

**ARTICULATING AND ILLUSTRATING A DIALOGICAL HERMENEUTIC FOR  
INTERPRETING THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN WHITE**

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the Faculty of the  
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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**Articulating and Illustrating a Dialogical Hermeneutic for Interpreting the Writings of**

**Ellen White**

**by**

**Craig Harris Newborn**

**The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not taught the verbal inspiration of the writings of Ellen White, but the widespread use of the proof-text method makes it evident that verbal inspiration has been assumed. This long-term practice has caused certain of White's views to be distorted in a legalistic manner and thus dismissed as not particularly relevant to the present generation of Adventists.**

**This dissertation is designed to provide Adventists with an honest and intellectually satisfying approach to White's writings by developing a dialogical hermeneutic for interpreting them. The hermeneutic is illustrated by putting White's counsel regarding the role of parents in the spiritual development of children into dialogue with the theories of Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Alice Miller, and selected socialization/enculturation theorists.**

**The research method and design include: (1) articulating and illustrating a dialogical hermeneutic; (2) discerning points of convergence and divergence between selected theorists and White; and (3) comparative analysis where the theorists are engaged in critical dialogue with White; thus (4) demonstrating that the current disengagement from White's Testimonies is not based on internal inadequacies, but rather is based on factors external to both White and the Testimonies.**



Rizzuto's theory of God representations clarifies why so much of White's advice to parents centered on facial expressions, tone of voice, demeanor, and frame of mind. Miller's case studies help to clarify why White counseled parents to avoid harsh treatment of children. John Westerhoff's critique of the schooling/instructional paradigm provides a lens through which to view how the Seventh-day Adventist Church related to White's Testimonies after the General Conference of 1888 and again after her death in 1915. The position the church took then opened the door to a legalistic interpretation of her writings and culminated in the current disengagement from her Testimonies. The dialogical hermeneutic proposed in this dissertation repudiates proof-texting and illustrates how the principles in White's Testimonies can be discerned and clarified through critical interaction with the views of other theorists.

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## DEDICATION

**To Lucille Gibbs, Fannie Stephens,  
Jan, Bear, Sheree, Leo, and Morgan Clae.**

## INTRODUCTION

### The Problem

In the 1980s, several youth-related issues combined to prompt the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to develop a church-wide plan for change. These included: (1) a drop in school enrollment; (2) an increased exposure of its youth to popular culture; and (3) a fear of declining loyalty of the youth to the church.<sup>1</sup> The plan called for a division-wide research project, Valuegenesis, concentrating “on the faith, values, and commitment of Adventist youth, grades 6-12.”<sup>2</sup> The problem addressed by this dissertation is one identified by Valuegenesis: that because Adventist youth are confused about the church’s teachings regarding Ellen White, and hence not inclined to read her writings, the church needs to develop new ways to interpret them and to communicate an honest, defensible, and positive view of White’s life and ministry to our youth, as well as draw guidance from White for relating with youth in the future.<sup>3</sup>

As a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, White’s influence on the church’s sense of mission, its identity, and its development of doctrines was profound. The history of this church is so inextricably interwoven with the life, ministry, and writings of Ellen White that the disengagement from her by the present generation of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Benson and Michael J. Donahue, Valuegenesis: Report 1 (Silver Spring, Md.: Office of Education, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Valuegenesis involved 12,000 Adventist youth in grades 6 through 12, 1900 parents, and 700 pastors, teachers, and principals. Benson and Donahue, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Roger L. Dudley and V. Bailey Gillespie, Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992), 274-75.

Adventist youth could translate into declining denominational loyalty for the youth and create an identity crisis for the church. Using Valuegenesis data, Roger Dudley and Bailey Gillespie, prominent Adventist educators and researchers, conclude that significant numbers of our youth have a legalistic view of spiritual life, a view that contributes to widespread despair and hopelessness.<sup>4</sup> Thus, though our youth have a good understanding of, and confidence in, the basic doctrines that define the denomination--the second coming of Jesus, the Sabbath, and the state of the dead--they are ambivalent about their beliefs regarding other significant teachings, including the church's teachings about White.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the effort to re-engage the youth with her writings, it is necessary to provide a positive and honest view of her ministry.

### The Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop and illustrate a dialogical hermeneutic that will provide an honest, defensible, and positive approach to the writings of Ellen White for the present generation of Adventists, especially youth and those who relate with them. The dialogical hermeneutic will be illustrated by using White's concept of the role of parents in the spiritual development of children as clarified through critical interaction with selected theorists.

Though the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not taught the verbal inspiration of the writings of Ellen White, the widespread use of the proof-text method, in which isolated passages are used to prove specific doctrines, makes it evident that verbal

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<sup>4</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 272-73.

<sup>5</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 273.



inspiration has been assumed.<sup>6</sup> This long-term practice has caused her views to be distorted in a legalistic manner and thus dismissed as not particularly valid or relevant to the present context. Consequently, the present generation of Adventist youth is loathe to engage her writings, and their loyalty to the denomination is declining. Some observers warn that the church is on the brink of losing this generation of youth unless concerted and deliberate action is taken soon.<sup>7</sup> The dialogical hermeneutic presented in this dissertation seeks to counter the dominating authority afforded White's writings by the misguided proof-texting method (a method by which parents and leaders failed to communicate White's central guiding principles) and to reverse the tendency of Adventist youth to dismiss her writings as neither relevant nor authoritative.

### The Thesis

The thesis of this dissertation is that an honest, defensible, and intellectually satisfying approach to Ellen White's Testimonies can be developed for and communicated to Adventist youth and those who relate with them through articulating a dialogical hermeneutic, exemplified in a focused analysis of White's views of the parental role in children's spiritual development through critical interaction with Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Alice Miller, and selected socialization/enculturation theorists.

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<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 269-70.

### The Argument

The central arguments are: the Seventh-day Adventist Church is at a moment of crisis, a crisis that is intimately connected to the youth of the church and their lack of engagement with White, the church's prophet. I will argue that a way out of the current disengagement can be made by developing and illustrating a dialogical hermeneutic that allows for an honest, defensible, and positive approach to White's writings; that this dialogical hermeneutic can be illustrated by putting White's emphasis on the role of parents in the spiritual development of children into dialogue with the theories of Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Alice Miller, and selected socialization/enculturation theorists. Since White has come to be seen as an inflexible, legalistic voice in the church, it is important to understand how that view developed and seek to correct it if the evidence allows. In pursuit of that positive view, I will demonstrate that personal experience is foundational in the formation of the religious convictions of children and that the primacy of personal experience can be reconfirmed by engaging White in a mutually critical dialogue with Rizzuto, Miller, and socialization/enculturation theorists.

The argument will be made that: (1) the psychoanalytic concept of object relations clarifies the dynamics within the human psyche regarding the interaction of the environment and the developing child, and that this concept provides a lens through which to view the psychological mechanics of personal experience; (2) Rizzuto's use of the concept of object relations to explain how children form representations of God is a cogent means of demonstrating the potency of parental influences; (3) Rizzuto's theory is viable and can be used to help explain how children form religious convictions; (4)

White's assertions of how parents stand in the place of God to their young children are compatible with Rizzuto's theory; (5) Alice Miller's careful documentation of the far-reaching implications of poor parenting techniques provides further support for the primacy of personal experience in the formation of children's religious convictions. Her ideas and White's contentions regarding the negative impact on society of 'an ill-regulated family' will be used to critique each other; (6) some of the current emphases in faith development and spiritual formation theories, especially the socialization/enculturation theory of John Westerhoff, presuppose the primacy of personal and communal experience in the formation of children's religious convictions; (7) the case for the primacy of personal experience is further advanced when the socialization/enculturation theory is brought into a mutually critical dialogue with White's assertion that the religious education of children ought to be a home-centered venture, aided by the congregation and the church school all working together; and (8) the process described above provides one example of how a dialogical hermeneutic can be employed to provide an honest, defensible, and intellectually satisfying approach to White's writings that can be used to re-engage Adventist youth.

Chapter 1 will introduce Ellen White, illustrate White's profound impact on the development of the Adventist Church, and show how the desire of authoritarian leaders to hold on to past understandings caused them to selectively reject White's inspired counsel, increasing her vulnerability to attacks and precipitating the current disengagement from her writings. It will also introduce a dialogical hermeneutic as a means of re-engaging Adventist youth with White's writings.

Chapter 2 will present White's concept of the faithful parent, set forth the essential features of object relations theory relevant to this discussion, examine the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis, and discuss the concept of object relations as a key to understanding the primacy of personal experience. This dissertation defines personal experience as all of the things which impact a child's total being--mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally--and influence its development and how it relates to other people and to life in general. My use of this definition will be limited to experiences a child shares with its parents/caregivers and how those interpersonal encounters impact the spiritual development of the child. The term "parent" should be taken to include any one who has the primary care of a child, man or woman, single or married. Ellen White's historical context obviously flavored her thinking and emphasis on the role of mothers, but as used in this dissertation, mother refers to the person who has primary responsibility for the care of the child.

Chapter 3 will introduce Ana-Maria Rizzuto's theory of how children form representations of God and examine her concept of parents as a source of God representations. Further, it will demonstrate and verify her case for the critical infant years and the critical relationships between the infant and parents/caregivers, and highlight the role of personal experience in her theory. The chapter will conclude with a comparative analysis and critique of Rizzuto and White regarding God concepts.

Chapter 4 will review what Alice Miller and Ellen White have said about the impact of poor parenting on children and on society at large. Miller's case studies will be

examined as evidence of the results of poor parenting. A comparative analysis and critique of Miller's and White's views will conclude the chapter.

Chapter 5 will examine how religious education can contribute to a child's development of a positive God representation. It will demonstrate the importance of cooperation between the home, church, and school in the spiritual formation of children by bringing White and selected socialization/enculturation theorists into dialogue.

Chapter 6 will illustrate the final step in the dialogical hermeneutic by appropriating several principles revealed in earlier chapters of this dissertation. It will assess the state of Adventist education, illustrate that while White resisted an inflexible interpretation and use of her Testimonies, they were, nonetheless, used in that fashion, and critique White's goal for Adventist education. The chapter will show that it is not too late for the Church to develop new ways of understanding and presenting Ellen White.

### The Methods

The methods employed include: (1) developing and illustrating a dialogical hermeneutic; (2) discerning points of convergence and divergence between selected theorists of child psychology and children's spiritual formation and the ideas of Ellen White; (3) comparative analysis of specific issues discussed by both White and the theorists; thus (4) demonstrating that the current disengagement from White's Testimonies is not based on internal inadequacies or unsound principles, but rather is based on factors external to both White and the Testimonies.

Histories of Adventism provide insights regarding the church's understanding of Ellen White, its relationship to her, its acceptance or rejection of her prophetic gifts, its

uses and misuses of her work, and make apparent the contribution of those trends to the current situation. White's Adventist Home, Child Guidance, Selected Messages, and Testimonies to the Church, along with selected portions of others of her published books and articles, serve as the source for determining her views regarding personal experience, parental influences on children, the formation of religious convictions in children, and the religious education of children.

Ana-Maria Rizzuto's writings regarding children's God representations will be studied, especially The Birth of the Living God. Particular attention will be paid to Rizzuto's emphasis on the importance of parental influences on children's formation of God representations. In the effort to present Ellen White to Adventists as a credible source, Rizzuto and White's positions on parental influences on children will be highlighted. Selected portions of the writings of object relations theorists Melanie Klein, W. R. D. Fairbairn, D. W. Winnicott, Daniel Stern, and William Meissner yield key insights into the nature and impact of object relationships which facilitates my understanding of Rizzuto's theory.

Alice Miller's For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence, Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experience of Facing Painful Truth, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child, and Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries give life to children's negative experiences, and heighten my awareness of the need to educate prospective parents and parents regarding the critical nature of their personal examples and caregiving. The work of selected socialization/enculturation theorists, especially John Westerhoff, provide

insights into the spiritual socialization of children and a tool with which to evaluate the Adventist church's use of the schooling/instructional model.

### Scope and Limitations

This dissertation is about a current crisis within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a crisis connected with past miscommunication of Ellen White's central principles by parents and leaders, and the current disengagement from her writings by Adventist youth. This dissertation is focused on presenting Ellen White to Adventists as a credible source so that they can then determine whether and how her ministry is to be a source of authority in the continuing formation of their religious convictions. White's contributions to the Adventist church are so much a part of the fiber of the organization that disengagement from her Testimonies by a generation of Adventists bodes ill for the future of the church, a point that will be discussed in chapter one.

This dissertation presents positions White has taken regarding the role of parents in the spiritual development of children with the intent of illustrating a positive approach to her writings for today's Adventist youth. This is not a presentation of Adventist history. Nor is it an examination or critique of Seventh-day Adventist education. It is not a thorough examination of the life and work of Ellen White. This project does not attempt to establish the credibility of Ellen White as a prophet to those who are not Seventh-day Adventists.

This is a presentation of Rizzuto's view of how children form representations of God and how her view is grounded in assumptions having to do with the primacy of personal experience in the spiritual development of children. This is a presentation of

how Rizzuto's theory, when brought into critical dialogue with the views of White, can be used to help clarify key principles in White's writings as well as create a positive approach to them. This is not a thorough examination of Rizzuto's psychodynamic theory.

This dissertation assumes the validity of Miller's conclusions and compares and contrasts them with specific assertions of White. This project engages the views of selected socialization/enculturation theorists regarding how children's faith develops within a social context and regarding what children experience within a faith community. It shows how their views both converge with and diverge from those of White and how that interplay serves the task of creating a positive approach to her writings. However, it is not a thorough examination of the theory of human faith development and spiritual growth.

#### The Importance of this Dissertation as an Original Contribution

While the impact of Ellen White on the Seventh-day Adventist Church is undeniable, her future influence on the church and the identity of the church are in serious doubt; in part because the level of commitment of youth to Adventism is declining, because the youth tend to be unfamiliar with her writings, and because they are not inclined to read them. Valuegenesis identified the need to develop new ways to present the life and ministry of Ellen White to Adventist youth, ways that are both intellectually and spiritually satisfying. With the intent of helping to preserve the identity of the church and for the sake of Adventist youth, this dissertation provides a dialogical hermeneutic as one of those new ways.



## CHAPTER 1

### A Prophet Among Us

As a small child, Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915) was taught that the second coming of Christ would be preceded by a thousand years of peace on the earth. However, her sense of security was shattered at age nine when she found a scrap of paper containing portions of a sermon by an Englishman warning that the world would be destroyed in about thirty years. She was overwhelmed by this prospect and thereafter prayed continuously to be ready for the second advent. Four years later, she encountered William Miller whose messages brought the second coming even nearer and struck conviction to her heart.<sup>1</sup> She believed Miller was preaching truth and committed herself to being ready for an advent expected to occur within three to four years.<sup>2</sup> When Christ did not come as expected in October of 1844, Ellen White was among the group of Millerites who were disappointed but not disheartened.<sup>3</sup> She emerged from the midst of a group of Millerites who subscribed to the idea that the door of mercy was closed to play a major role in leading this group out of fanaticism and disappointment into establishing the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church likes to trace its roots in history back beyond the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 1840s to John Wesley and the Evangelical

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White (1915; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> White, Life Sketches, 44.

<sup>3</sup> White, Life Sketches, 61.

revivalists of eighteenth century England, to the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, and to groups of dissenters like the Lollards and Waldenses. In fact, Adventists make connections all the way back to Christ and the apostles.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the merits of these claims, “modern Adventism developed in the setting of the great advent awakening which took place in the early years of the nineteenth century,”<sup>5</sup> and “the Millerite movement was the ground from which the Seventh-day Adventist Church grew.”<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will introduce Ellen White, illustrate White’s profound impact on the development of the Adventist Church, and show how the desire of authoritarian leaders to hold on to past understandings caused them selectively to reject White’s inspired counsel and increased her vulnerability to attacks. In addition, a dialogical hermeneutic for approaching White’s writings will be introduced. The purposes of this chapter are: first, to provide a historical context for the present discussion; second, to demonstrate that the current disengagement from the writings of Ellen White resulted from a faulty method of appropriating the counsels of White; and finally to articulate a dialogical hermeneutic by which White’s Testimonies can be analyzed.

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<sup>4</sup> R. W. Schwarz, Light Bearers to the Remnant (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 13; and Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, vol. 2, Reformation to the Present, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, HarperCollins Publishers, 1975), 1029-32.

<sup>5</sup> Schwarz, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ann D. Jordan, The Seventh-day Adventists: A History (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988), 37.

### Who is Ellen White?

Ellen Gould Harmon White was a prophetess and cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She was a writer, lecturer, and counselor to the church. She “possessed what Seventh-day Adventists have accepted as the prophetic gift described in the Bible.”<sup>7</sup> The Adventist Church expresses its convictions on this issue by maintaining that

one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.<sup>8</sup>

Ellen Harmon and her twin sister Elizabeth were the youngest children in their family. They were born November 26, 1827, in Gorham, Maine. Ellen’s parents, Robert and Eunice Harmon were active members of the Methodist Episcopal Church for forty years. During that time, they had the pleasure of seeing all eight of their children baptized.<sup>9</sup>

The Harmon family moved to Portland, Maine, while Ellen was still a small child. It is said that she was cheerful, buoyant, and active until the age of nine when her nose

<sup>7</sup> Francis D. Nichol, “Ellen Gould Harmon White,” in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ed. Francis D. Nichol, 10 vols., Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 10:1584.

<sup>8</sup> Seventh-day Adventists, General Conference, Ministerial Association, Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 216.

<sup>9</sup> White, Life Sketches, 17.

was broken by a stone thrown by a classmate.<sup>10</sup> That accident changed her appearance and compromised her health to such a degree that it interrupted her schooling for a time, and later caused her to withdraw from school at the age of twelve.<sup>11</sup> In 1840, when Ellen was thirteen, the Harmon family heard William Miller lecturing in Portland and accepted his view that Christ's coming was near.<sup>12</sup> Several months later, Ellen "gave her heart to God" while attending a Methodist camp meeting, and on June 26, 1842, she was baptized in Casco Bay and received into membership at the Pine Street Methodist Church.<sup>13</sup>

Ellen Harmon's commitment to God and spiritual things was deep, and she apparently did not hesitate to take a stand on issues she believed in, evidenced by her insistence that her pastor baptize her by immersion. She reports: "Young as I was, I could see but one mode of baptism authorized by the scriptures, and that was immersion. Some of my Methodist sisters tried in vain to convince me that sprinkling was Bible baptism."<sup>14</sup>

Ellen's parents had no idea that their acceptance of Miller's view regarding the second advent would lead to their family's being dismissed from the Pine Street Methodist Church in Portland, Maine. Their minister came to their home and informed

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<sup>10</sup> Nichol, 10:1584.

<sup>11</sup> White, Life Sketches, 18-19; and Nichol, 10:1585.

<sup>12</sup> Nichol, 10:1585.

<sup>13</sup> Nichol, 10:1585; and White, Life Sketches, 25.

<sup>14</sup> White, Life Sketches, 25.

them that their “faith and Methodism could not agree,” that “they had adopted a new and strange belief that the Methodist church could not accept.”<sup>15</sup> The pastor asked the family to withdraw quietly from the church and spare itself the embarrassment of a public trial. The family, wanting to avoid giving the impression that they were either ashamed of their belief in the second advent or could not support that belief by Scripture, opted for the trial and demanded to know what sin was charged against them.<sup>16</sup>

They were tried. The family was summoned to a meeting held in the vestry of the church. They were accused of walking contrary to the rules of Methodism.<sup>17</sup> When they asked what specific rule they had violated, they were told that they “had attended other meetings, and had neglected to meet regularly with” their class.<sup>18</sup> The family argued that they were in violation of no rule of the church and that the only point of difference between them and the church was the family’s hope of the soon coming Redeemer, a hope they were not willing to relinquish and for which they were willing to be expelled as heretics. And so they were.<sup>19</sup>

It is reported that James White wrote that he met the very timid Ellen in Portland, Maine, when she was sixteen years old and found her to be a Christian of the most devoted type. He wrote that, even then, Ellen labored in the cause of Christ in public and

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<sup>15</sup> White, Life Sketches, 50.

<sup>16</sup> White, Life Sketches, 51-52.

<sup>17</sup> White, Life Sketches, 52.

<sup>18</sup> White, Life Sketches, 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> White, Life Sketches, 52-53.

from house to house; that her rich Christian experience and powerful testimony caused leading men of various churches to invite her to speak to their congregations; and that she was convinced that the second advent was near and she was very anxious for it to occur.<sup>20</sup>

William Miller, Ellen Harmon, and the hosts of Millerites were disappointed when Christ did not come by the end of the Spring of 1844. The rise of the seventh month movement which set the new date for the advent at October 22, 1844, brought new hope; hope that turned into bitter disappointment when Christ did not come.<sup>21</sup> Adventist historian George Knight asserts that up to the disappointment, and in spite of disagreement over issues like the fall of Babylon and the mortality of the soul, Millerite Adventists had maintained “relative doctrinal harmony” by focusing “on the single issue of the imminent, premillennial return of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Knight reports that this harmony had dissipated by early 1845 as the first major doctrinal confrontation developed over whether or not anything of significance had happened on October 22, 1844.<sup>23</sup> Those who denied that October 22 was a fulfillment of prophecy became known as open-door Adventists and those who believed that prophecy had been fulfilled in some way on October 22

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<sup>20</sup> Nichol, 10:1585.

<sup>21</sup> William Miller, “Wm. Miller’s Apology and Defense,” in 1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism, comp. and ed. George R. Knight (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 61, 64-65; White, Life Sketches, 61. White wrote that “it was a bitter disappointment that fell upon the little flock whose faith had been so strong and whose hope had been so high.”

<sup>22</sup> George R. Knight, “The ‘Scattering Time’ and the Albany Conference,” in 1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism, comp. and ed. George R. Knight (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 131.

<sup>23</sup> Knight, “Scattering Time,” 131.

became known as shut-door Adventists.<sup>24</sup> The shut door Adventists also believed that the door of God's mercy had been closed to those who refused to believe that Jesus was coming on October 22, 1844; the open-door Adventists believed that the door of God's mercy was still open.<sup>25</sup>

The shut-door Adventists based their continued confidence in the significance of October 22 on something that occurred October 23, 1844. A number of Adventists had gathered in a granary to pray that God would give them an explanation of their disappointment. After the prayer session, Hiram Edson and O. R. L. Crosier went for a walk during which Edson experienced some form of revelation through which he was shown that the earth was not the sanctuary that was to be cleansed on October 22. The sanctuary that was to be cleansed was in heaven.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the shut-door Adventists concluded that something special had taken place on that date. Ellen Harmon was a shut-door Adventist.

The shut-door/open-door issue led to a permanent split among Adventists.<sup>27</sup> Historian Sydney Ahlstrom, referring to the period between 1835 and 1845, correctly noted that "within a decade the once grand movement was reduced to a disorganized

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<sup>24</sup> Knight, "Scattering Time," 131.

<sup>25</sup> Knight, "Scattering Time," 131.

<sup>26</sup> Schwarz, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, "Scattering Time," 132.

welter of Adventist controversy.”<sup>28</sup> He reports that Ellen Harmon emerged out of this chaotic environment as an agent of reorganization, a point which will be discussed further in the section detailing Ellen White’s impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>29</sup>

### White’s Impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Kenneth Wood, retired editor of the Adventist Review, and current president and board chair of the Ellen G. White Estate, summarizes the life of Ellen White.<sup>30</sup> He says that her ministry began in 1844 after she received her first vision, and it ended at her death in 1915; at the age of nineteen (on August 30, 1846), she married Adventist preacher James White. Together they traveled extensively throughout the United States, preaching, instructing church members, and establishing medical and publishing institutions until James died in 1881. After the death of her husband, Ellen White spent two years in Europe and ten years in Australia. During her ministry, “God gave her

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<sup>28</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 480. The decade that Ahlstrom refers to began in 1835 when William Miller first published his lectures on the Second Coming and ended in April 1845 when Miller and others met in Albany, New York to discuss a series of new beliefs being advocated by several former colleagues in “an attempt to maintain harmony, unity, and orthodoxy”( Schwarz, 54).

<sup>29</sup> Ahlstrom, 481.

<sup>30</sup> The Adventist Review, published since 1849, is the general paper of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



approximately 2000 visions,” the shortest lasting only seconds and the longest involving nearly four hours.<sup>31</sup> Two hundred of these visions occurred in public.<sup>32</sup>

Kenneth Wood informs us that White wrote out much of what she had received “through these supernatural experiences” because God had told her to make it known. That was an order she obeyed with apparent enthusiasm. When she died in 1915, White left 26 books, 5000 magazine articles, and 55,000 pages of manuscript.<sup>33</sup> Wood asserts that even though White was writing during a time of confusion and turmoil in various spheres (medicine, nutrition, social relations, and education), her writings “set forth truths that are fully compatible with studies and findings in the twentieth century.”<sup>34</sup> This dissertation endorses that assertion.

There were three principle sources for her writings: studying the Bible, reading historical and religious books and periodicals, and seeing visions.<sup>35</sup> Wood is quick to add that the intimate nature of her spiritual encounters with God during the visions did give her “special information and unique insights.”<sup>36</sup> While Wood acknowledges that

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<sup>31</sup> Kenneth H. Wood, “She Called Herself ‘Messenger,’” Adventist Review, Special Issue, 30 May 1996, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Karen Carlton, “A Typical Day, an Extraordinary Life,” Adventist Review, Special Issue, 30 May 1996, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Wood, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Wood, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Wood, 7-8.

there were many benefits associated with White's visions, he set several benefits above all others: they laid the basis for a consistent theology by setting forth a cogent view of the great controversy between Christ and Satan; they helped White and the church to define truth and to apply Bible principles to everyday life; they expanded the church's understanding of the gospel commission; and they helped the church "to understand and interpret many prophecies of the Bible."<sup>37</sup>

One way to contextualize the benefits of Ellen White's visions and her overall impact on the Seventh-day Adventist church is to return to the time just after the disappointment of 1844 when a resurgence of Bible study prevailed among Adventists. Some of the people believed that something very important had happened on October 22, and others did not. The period of renewed Bible study led Apollos Hale and Joseph Turner to conclude that, shortly before the anticipated advent, everybody's fate was fixed forever, and that on October 22, 1844, the door of salvation had actually closed to all who had not endorsed or accepted the idea that Christ was coming on that day. The advocates of this view felt no urge to preach to sinners. If the door to eternity was shut, why preach to the lost? The sense of mission that had characterized the Millerite Adventists was gone.<sup>38</sup> This shut-door view was accepted by many Adventists, including Ellen White.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wood, 8.

<sup>38</sup> George R. Knight, The Fat Lady and the Kingdom: Confronting the Challenges of Change and Secularization (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995), 82.

<sup>39</sup> Schwarz, 55, 69-70.

The new wave of Bible study saw the rise of a group called the Spiritualizers who argued that Christ had come in a spiritual sense, not in the flesh; that on October 22, Christ had actually come by spiritually entering his believers and making them “immortal and incorruptible”; and that Miller had erred in concluding that Christ would come visibly with a human form.<sup>40</sup> There is no indication that Ellen Harmon ever subscribed to this view. Yet she was in close association with these spiritualizers because of their conviction that the Millerite date of October 22 was correct. As noted earlier, in early 1845 there were two basic groups of Adventists: the open-door Adventists and the shut-door Adventists. The open-door Adventists believed that the door of salvation was still open to all people, and further, they no longer believed that there was anything particularly significant about October 22, 1844; they were convinced that it was just a tragic mistake.<sup>41</sup> Because Ellen White and other shut-door Adventists were certain that October 22 was important, in spite of the disappointment, they would not fellowship with the open-door Adventists.<sup>42</sup> White wrote that she found little spirituality in New Hampshire among post-disappointment Adventists, many of whom had

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<sup>40</sup> Schwarz, 55.

<sup>41</sup> George R. Knight, Millennial Fever and the End of the World (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 295.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, Millennial Fever, 295.

“pronounced their experience in the movement of 1844 a delusion.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, she rejected the position that these people had taken.<sup>44</sup>

Bible study and contact with Seventh Day Baptists brought the issue of the Sabbath up for debate. Rachel Oakes learned of the Sabbath from Seventh Day Baptists. Oakes shared her discovery with Frederick Wheeler, who shared it with T. M. Preble. Preble subsequently wrote a tract advocating the seventh day as the Sabbath of the Bible. This tract influenced Joseph Bates, who in turn, wrote a pamphlet on the Sabbath which convinced James and Ellen White.<sup>45</sup> There were other issues under study; some of them were hotly contested: “the state of the dead, the fate of the damned, the role of Satan, the nature of the Millennium, the Judgment, and the Atonement.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, in a short space of time, the Millerite movement had become a chaotic mass of Adventist controversy.<sup>47</sup> Ellen Harmon White played a major role in leading the shut-door, antimission sabbatarian Adventists out of this morass.

In late 1845 or early 1846, Edson and friends invited Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain and leader among the post-disappointment Adventists, to come for a visit so that

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<sup>43</sup> White, Life Sketches, 78-79.

<sup>44</sup> White, Life Sketches, 78-79.

<sup>45</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell, Moving Out, ed. Richard E. Harris (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1973), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Ahlstrom, 480.

<sup>47</sup> Ahlstrom, 480.

they could exchange views. Bates accepted the idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary, and he, in turn, urged the others to join him in keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath.<sup>48</sup>

When James and Ellen White first encountered Bates's ideas about the seventh-day as the Sabbath, they thought he was pushing the Sabbath commandment too far. Ellen White admitted that she thought that Bates was mistaken in placing so much emphasis on the fourth commandment.<sup>49</sup> Subsequent to hearing Bates present his views on the Sabbath, however, White had a vision in which she saw a halo of light circling the fourth commandment and was told that the promises of Isaiah 58:12-14 applied to those who would work to restore the true Sabbath.<sup>50</sup> Further evidence regarding the Sabbath question was given in a vision White experienced on April 3, 1847.<sup>51</sup>

In 1846, shortly after Crosier's article on the sanctuary appeared, White had a vision in which she was shown that Crosier "had the true light, on the cleansing of the sanctuary," and that God wanted him to write out his views fully.<sup>52</sup> White reported that an angel spoke to her in a vision about the disappointment of God's people and the sanctuary.

Said the angel, "Has God's word failed? Has God failed to fulfill His promises? No; He has fulfilled all that He has promised. Jesus has risen up and shut the door of the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary and has opened a door into the most holy place and entered in to cleanse the sanctuary. All who wait patiently

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<sup>48</sup> Schwarz, 63.

<sup>49</sup> White, Life Sketches, 95-96.

<sup>50</sup> White, Life Sketches, 96.

<sup>51</sup> White, Life Sketches, 100-01.

<sup>52</sup> Schwarz, 67.

shall understand the mystery. Man has erred; but there has been no failure on the part of God. All was accomplished that God promised; but man erroneously believed the earth to be the sanctuary to be cleansed at the end of the prophetic periods. It is man's expectation, not the promise of God, that has failed.<sup>53</sup>

White had not been the one researching the sanctuary and digging these insights out of scripture. Other Adventists like Crosier were doing that. Her subsequent visions confirmed the results of their intensive study and the developing concept of the relationship of the heavenly sanctuary to October 22. Without doubt she played a significant part in establishing the structure of Bible doctrines that were adopted by early Adventists.<sup>54</sup>

For Ellen White and her associates, the years of 1845-48 were a time of intensive Bible study. Their desire to understand the disappointment and to confirm their belief in the second advent prompted them to hold several Bible conferences in 1848. These conferences resulted in Bible truths becoming clearer and more connected to each other.<sup>55</sup>

About thirty-five people gathered for the August 18, 1848, conference in Volney, New York. White reported that there were hardly two in that number who agreed; that "some were holding serious errors, and each strenuously urged his own views, declaring that they were according to Scriptures."<sup>56</sup> The arguments were intense and the doctrinal

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<sup>53</sup> Ellen G. White, Early Writings of Ellen G. White, (1882; reprint, Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), 250-51.

<sup>54</sup> T. Housel Jemison, A Prophet Among You (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1955), 210.

<sup>55</sup> Jemison, 208.

<sup>56</sup> White, Life Sketches, 110-11.

positions advocated were diverse, radical, and strongly supported by their devotees. The discord was so dominant that Ellen White fainted. When she revived she was taken into vision. The vision revealed to her many of the errors that were being advocated and White was instructed to appeal to the participants to abandon their erroneous positions and unite upon known truths.<sup>57</sup> She reports that the meeting closed triumphantly as the “brethren renounced their errors . . . .”<sup>58</sup>

Other meetings were held which proved valuable to the process of doctrinal unification.<sup>59</sup> The role Ellen White played in the development of these doctrinal positions was setting a pattern of exhaustive study followed by a vision that either confirmed their conclusions or clarified them. White noted,

After the passing of the time in 1844, we searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late in the night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to the point in their study where they said, “We can do nothing more,” the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passage we had been studying would be given to me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> White, Life Sketches, 111.

<sup>58</sup> White, Life Sketches, 111.

<sup>59</sup> Jemison, 208.

<sup>60</sup> Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, no. 2 (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1904), 56-57.

She confided that she was unable to understand the reasoning of the men who were studying the Bible. It was as if her mind was locked and she could not grasp the meaning of the verses under study. She admitted that this situation caused her great sorrow. Her inability to comprehend prevailed until the major doctrines had been clarified. She reported that the brethren knew that, unless she was in vision, she could not understand these matters. Therefore, when she received information in visions, they accepted it as light from heaven.<sup>61</sup> According to White, this scenario was repeated many times.<sup>62</sup>

From this we see clearly the pattern that emerged for the development of doctrines: first, these Adventist pioneers met together for the purpose of Bible study; second, they engaged Scripture and shared their personal views of its meaning; and finally, when no consensus in biblical interpretation emerged, Ellen White was given a vision which clarified the issue under study.

During 1848, Adventist pioneers held several Bible conferences for the purposes of discussing new biblical understandings discovered since the Great Disappointment, correcting errors in their beliefs, seeking greater clarity of last-day prophecies, and providing mutual encouragement to one another. These intensive study sessions and accompanying visions resulted in agreement on eight basic points:

(1) the imminent, personal, premillennial second advent; (2) the two-fold ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, whose cleansing had begun in 1844; (3) the seventh-day Sabbath; (4) God's special supernatural enlightenment

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<sup>61</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Work for This Time: Development of the Interests at Washington," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 25 May 1905, 17.

<sup>62</sup> Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel -- No. 1: Journey to Southern California," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 14 June 1906, 8.



through Ellen White; (5) the duty to proclaim all three angels' messages; (6) conditional immortality and death as a dreamless sleep; (7) the timing of the seven last plagues; and (8) the final, complete extinction of the wicked after the millennium.<sup>63</sup>

The understandings of basic doctrines arrived at by Adventist pioneers during the 1848 Bible conferences are essentially the same today.<sup>64</sup>

White's impact on the church can also be seen by tracing the development of what George Knight calls a "missiological quadrilateral": publishing, medical care, education, and conference aspects of the denomination's work.<sup>65</sup> A "missiological quadrilateral" suggests a mission and evangelistic intentions. Thus the question which begs to be asked is, How did the sabbatarian Adventists recover the missionary zeal for the lost that had been rejected by the shut-door belief? White's visions played a major role in the re-emergence of a concern for the salvation of the masses, and they also provided the ideological basis for the "missiological quadrilateral."

Ellen White had a vision in November of 1848, and based on its contents, she advised her husband to begin writing and publishing their views. He began the venture and continued in spite of multiple difficulties.<sup>66</sup> Captain Joseph Bates opposed the publishing effort, and James stopped for a while. The effort was restarted at Ellen White's insistence.<sup>67</sup> From that time until now, publishing houses have been an essential

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<sup>63</sup> Schwarz, 68-69.

<sup>64</sup> Jemison, 209.

<sup>65</sup> Knight, Fat Lady, 81.

<sup>66</sup> White, Life Sketches, 125-26.

<sup>67</sup> Schwarz, 75-76.

part of the Adventist mission to preach, teach, and heal. Today the church operates 56 publishing houses, in part, because of Ellen White's 1848 vision and her faithfulness to its message.

Running a publishing program that was ever expanding, accelerated the need for church organization. When the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association was incorporated in May of 1861, a major step was taken towards the Seventh-day Adventist Church's becoming a legal denomination.<sup>68</sup> From October 1861 to October 1862, eight local conferences were organized; a general conference was established in May of 1863.<sup>69</sup>

Ellen White had been advocating for some form of organization and gospel order since 1854. So deep was the Millerite Adventist aversion to organized religion that even Ellen White's vision-based urging for organization took a long time to bear fruit. Today there are 447 local conferences and missions, 92 union conferences and missions, and nearly 40,000 congregations.<sup>70</sup>

White's visions of June 1863 and December 1865 called for vigorous stands to be taken on temperance and health reform, and on the basis of these visions, she advocated for the establishment of a health reform institution with intentional outreach to non-Adventists. Guarding one's health became a theological issue.<sup>71</sup> The denomination's

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<sup>68</sup> Knight, Fat Lady, 83.

<sup>69</sup> Schwarz, 96-97; and Knight, Fat Lady, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Knight, Fat Lady, 92.

<sup>71</sup> Knight, Fat Lady, 85.

present 148 hospitals and sanitariums and 446 clinics give further witness to the influence of Ellen White and her counsel.

The final piece of the Adventist missiological quadrilateral is its educational program. The basic educational philosophy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was enunciated by Ellen G. White. Based on insights gained from visions, she guided the church in establishing and developing schools and in implementing an educational philosophy whose goal was the balanced development of the mental, physical, and spiritual powers of children through the cooperative efforts of the home, church, and school. She insisted that Adventist schools, like the biblical schools of the prophets established by Samuel, were to serve as a barrier against the corrupting influences of society, provide for the mental and spiritual welfare of youth, and promote national prosperity by educating a God-fearing leadership.<sup>72</sup>

Early in 1872, Ellen White had her first vision on the principles of education and subsequently wrote out the substance of what she had seen. Most of that counsel was addressed to parents, guardians, and teachers; all of whom White declared disqualified to educate children properly until they had themselves learned “the lesson of self-control, patience, forbearance, gentleness, and love.”<sup>73</sup> White informed parents and teachers that their main burden should be “instructing, cultivating, polishing, and refining youth and

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<sup>72</sup> Ellen G. White, Education (1903; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952), 45-46. White maintained that the schools of the prophets were needed to help compensate for the failure of parents to properly train their children.

<sup>73</sup> Ellen G. White, “Proper Education” (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 3:131.

children.”<sup>74</sup> She maintained that “the training which King Solomon enjoined is to direct, educate, and develop.”<sup>75</sup> She informed the church in general, and parents in particular, that proper development required attention to be paid to the physical, mental, moral, and religious life of children.<sup>76</sup> Intellectual development was not to be put above moral training. Children were to be taught to respect and follow the advice of adults; and because “God never designed that one human mind should be under the complete control of another,” parents and teachers were warned against trying to control the mind, will, or conscience of children. Thus, children were to be taught how to think for themselves and encouraged to act on the basis of reason and principle.<sup>77</sup>

Today, in its Sabbath Schools, the Seventh-day Adventist Church provides a religious education curriculum and materials for all age groups within its congregations. It also operates the world’s second largest parochial education system, a system that covers the spectrum from kindergarten to doctoral-level universities. In North America, there are 1100 elementary and K-10 schools, 93 high schools, and 12 colleges and universities, all of which served approximately 83,000 students in 1990.<sup>78</sup> These schools have served the church well in undergirding the Adventist subculture, so much so that

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<sup>74</sup> White, “Importance of Home Training” (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:142.

<sup>75</sup> White, “Proper Education” (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:131.

<sup>76</sup> White, “Proper Education” (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:131.

<sup>77</sup> White, “Proper Education” (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:134.

<sup>78</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 3-4.

some observers within the church speak of the present as a golden age for Adventist education, a moment pregnant with promise. The Seltzer-Daley broad market research study of a representative sample of Seventh-day Adventists Church members and workers revealed that they still endorse the educational goals enunciated by Ellen White and believe that Adventist education is central both to the mission of the church and to the salvation of its children. It also concluded that education is the key to the survival of the denomination.<sup>79</sup>

Tracing the development of the “missiological quadrilateral” reveals the nature of White’s impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a co-founder of the church, White’s influence on the church’s identity, its sense of mission, its development of doctrines and institutions was formative and profound. However, any future influence that White’s Testimonies might have on the denomination is compromised by the fact that the current generation of Adventist youth are confused about the church’s teachings regarding her and thus are not inclined to read her writings. This translates into declining denominational loyalty for the youth and creates a potential identity crisis for the church. Furthermore, it poses a threat to the notion of a “golden age” in Adventist education. The next section details the path that led to the current crisis.

#### The Interpretive Path to Crisis: White and Today’s Adventist Youth

The Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledges that, until the realization of its blessed hope, the second advent, it must live in that uncomfortable tension existing

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<sup>79</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 10-11.

between “the enduring and the adaptable,” between those things which never change and those that must change.<sup>80</sup> The church concedes that: (1) there are strident voices within the membership crying out in defense of “historic Adventism,” voices opposed to change; (2) the occasional rise of authoritarian leaders has caused organizational rigidity, loss of creative thinking, and distortion of the contents of the church’s faith; (3) the authoritarian spirit which prevailed around 1888 “lays the foundation for division”; and (4) the habit of basing theological and doctrinal conclusions on the Testimonies of Ellen White “has made her vulnerable to attack.”<sup>81</sup>

The current disengagement of Adventist youth from the Testimonies of White is rooted in questions regarding her authority. By 1848 the Sabbatarian Adventists, before they officially became the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863, recognized “God’s special supernatural enlightenment through Ellen White.”<sup>82</sup> The denomination’s endorsement of White as prophetess has officially gone unchallenged. In 1988 the church reconfirmed its endorsement of White’s prophetic ministry in a publication of its fundamental doctrines.<sup>83</sup> However, it is not surprising that the nature of White’s authority and the authority of her Testimonies is, and has been, disputed from the beginning within

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<sup>80</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, General Conference, North American Division, Officers and Union Presidents, Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries (Hagerstown, Md.: North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1992), 35.

<sup>81</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Issues, 35, 45, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Schwarz, 69.

<sup>83</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “The Gift of Prophecy,” in Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 216-29.

the membership of the church,<sup>84</sup> when we consider the legacy they inherited from the Millerites.

A strength of Millerism was the rational development of its major doctrine regarding the second coming of Christ.<sup>85</sup> This reflects Miller's personal approach to Bible study. According to Miller's rule of interpreting the Bible, any person could prayerfully study the Bible and arrive at truth. Understanding the Bible required two things: diligent, prayerful reading and collating the various portions read.<sup>86</sup> He decided to avoid the use of Bible commentaries since the commentators often disagreed strongly with each other. Hence, he used only the Bible and Cruden's Concordance, allowing the Bible to be its own interpreter. He began his study in Genesis and moved forward only as he understood what he was reading. Miller explained that

whenever I found any thing obscure, my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages; and by the help of CRUDEN, I examined all the texts of Scripture in which were found any of the prominent words contained in any obscure portion. Then by letting every word have its proper bearing on the subject of the text, if my view of it harmonized with every collateral passage in the Bible, it ceased to be a difficulty. In this way I pursued the study of the Bible, in my first perusal of it, for about two years, and was fully satisfied that it is its own interpreter.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> White, Life Sketches, 88-89; and "Wrong Use of Visions" (Testimony 9, 1863), Testimonies, 1:382.

<sup>85</sup> Knight, Millennial Fever, 332.

<sup>86</sup> Knight, Millennial Fever, 37-38.

<sup>87</sup> William Miller, "Apology," 50.

Thus Miller developed satisfactory explanations of difficult passages through careful comparison with other Bible verses and reasoning.<sup>88</sup> With Miller, studying the Bible was taxing, yet rewarding. The Bible was like a new book to Miller and studying it “was indeed a feast of reason.”<sup>89</sup>

With such strong confidence in reason, it is not difficult to understand why the Millerites, at their May 1843 conference in Boston, took an official action in which they declared themselves to have no confidence at all in private revelations, dreams, and visions.<sup>90</sup> This action seems to have been taken to help control tendencies to fanaticism. A year later, Miller issued another statement condemning those who believed that they were guided by the Holy Spirit, and who claimed that they possessed “the gift of *intuitive discernment of spirits* [original emphasis] . . . .”<sup>91</sup>

The Millerite legacy laid a foundation of careful, reasoned Bible study, disregarding any need for visions and private revelations in determining the meaning of Scripture.<sup>92</sup> William Miller called the Bible a “feast of reason” and “a system of revealed truths” that was so simply presented that not even a fool need err in interpreting it.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Schwarz, 32.

<sup>89</sup> William Miller, “Apology,” 53.

<sup>90</sup> Knight, Millennial Fever, 172.

<sup>91</sup> Knight, Millennial Fever, 172-73.

<sup>92</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 23.

<sup>93</sup> William Miller, “Apology,” 53, 50.



Biblical interpretation was not so simple a matter for Adventist church founders.<sup>94</sup> We noticed earlier how they often met for long Bible study sessions and ended many of those sessions with no agreement as to the proper interpretation of the texts under study. At such times Ellen White reports that she was taken off in vision and given a clear explanation of these passages which were the center of study and confusion.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the visions of Ellen White gradually became the expounder of scripture and, according to Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, “reason was disregarded.”<sup>96</sup>

Ellen White’s rise to prominence among the faithful remnants of the Millerites is unquestioned.<sup>97</sup> The direct communication White received from God was important to this group inasmuch as the Disappointment had convinced them that the more established channels were flawed, especially human reason.<sup>98</sup> When those early Adventists accepted White’s pronouncements as divinely inspired, they revealed that they understood God to have “two authorized channels of revelation: the Bible and the Testimonies.”<sup>99</sup> To avoid

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<sup>94</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 25-26.

<sup>95</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Firm Foundation of Our Faith,” in Selected Messages from the Writings of Ellen G. White, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications, 3 vols. (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 1:206-07.

<sup>96</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 31.

<sup>97</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, America: Religions and Religion, 2nd ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992), 231.

<sup>98</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 24.

<sup>99</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 23. The counsel White gave to the church, whether oral or written, is called Testimonies.

any misunderstanding regarding the primacy of the Bible, Adventist publications were replete with official statements proclaiming the Bible to be the word of God and the only rule of faith by which to test everything, including the visions of Ellen White. These official proclamations camouflaged the unseen shifts that were taking place in the balance of authority. Though the church did not teach the verbal inspiration of either the Bible or the writings of Ellen White, “the universal use of the proof-text method, in which isolated passages from both sources were used to prove specific doctrines,” made it evident that verbal inspiration was assumed (especially for Ellen White’s writings).<sup>100</sup>

Thus, in spite of the fact that the leadership of the church discouraged the tendency to believe that scripture could only be understood through the writings of White, a segment of the membership persisted in that belief.<sup>101</sup> Her grandson, Arthur White, wrote:

There were many who, jealous for Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy, and not having thought the matter through, held, for all practical purposes, to a theory of verbal inspiration in the work of God’s prophets. An action disavowing this stance was taken by the General Conference in session in 1883. But by 1911 this was either unknown or forgotten by Adventists generally.<sup>102</sup>

How could this happen while Ellen White was still alive and actively involved in the church? Denominational leaders contributed significantly to the practice of using White’s Testimonies in a proof-texting fashion thus strengthening the notion of verbal

<sup>100</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 25-28.

<sup>101</sup> F. M. Wilcox, “The Position and Work of Mrs. E. G. White,” Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 31 March 1927, 3-6.

<sup>102</sup> Arthur White, The Later Elmshaven Years: 1905-1915, vol. 6 of Ellen G. White (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 322.

inspiration and making it possible for church members to forget its official pronouncement against verbal inspiration. The Minneapolis General Conference of 1888 illustrates how the church leadership undercut its official position.

This General Conference was the venue where theological battle lines were drawn. How the church related to the authority of Ellen White and the use it made of her Testimonies contributed to the resulting confusion regarding her counsel. The issue under discussion, at Minneapolis, centered on law and grace. A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, co-editors of a church magazine called the Signs, came to the conference in defense of their advocacy of righteousness by faith in the merits of Christ. They had been preaching this view for some time in the hope of countering what they considered to be an unbalanced emphasis on salvation by works.<sup>103</sup> The leadership of the church thought they were preaching antinomian views and rose up to defend the law of God. Ellen White spoke, wrote, pleaded, and counseled in an effort to get the leadership to see that the young preachers were correct and that the legalistic emphasis was scripturally unsound.<sup>104</sup> The leadership refused to yield. Outgoing General Conference President George I. Butler, not in attendance because of ill health, sounded the battle cry with his telegram urging the delegates to “Stand by the old landmarks!”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Schwarz, 185.

<sup>104</sup> Schwarz 183-90; and White, “The Law in Galatians,” in Selected Messages, 1:234-35.

<sup>105</sup> William G. Johnsson, The Fragmenting of Adventism (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995), 99; and Schwarz, 187.

William G. Johnsson, present editor of the Adventist Review, summarizes the debate at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference as a “dispute over the role of law in salvation, polarization, large-scale rejection of Waggoner’s and Jones’s emphasis but endorsement of it by Ellen White.”<sup>106</sup> Many Adventists of the 1870s and 1880s believed that salvation was a gift from God that would be earned by keeping the Ten Commandments. When Jones and Waggoner presented Christ’s righteousness alone as the means of human salvation, the leadership of the church rallied against them to defend the law. Ellen White’s inspired endorsement of Jones and Waggoner’s message placed her in opposition to many of the church leaders. They determined to ignore her inspired counsel and pursue a course designed to protect their legalistic model of salvation. Johnsson adds that just as the gospel had offended the Pharisees of Jesus day, so did the gospel offend the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church in 1888.<sup>107</sup>

Did this represent a new way of relating to the Testimonies? From 1844 up to 1888, the Testimonies of White had been the guiding light that pointed the way out of fanaticism and doctrinal confusion. Earlier, it was shown that after the Disappointment of 1844, the Testimonies had replaced the Millerite’s use of common sense as the interpreter of Scripture. Now common sense, or human reasoning was reasserting itself over against inspired insights. The Adventist Church was now charting a course that diverged from the path that White was advocating. The leaders of the denomination who were foremost

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<sup>106</sup> Johnsson, 99.

<sup>107</sup> Johnsson, 101, 104.

in fighting the message of Jones and Waggoner were faced with a dilemma. They still considered White to be an inspired counselor and guide, yet they chose not to follow her in this particular instance. Here, theory and practice were shown to be distinct.

White maintained that the church was not at liberty to pick and choose which of her Testimonies to accept and which to deny.<sup>108</sup> This picking and choosing would weaken the people's confidence in the Testimonies.<sup>109</sup> As early as 1876, White had warned that when confidence in the Testimonies is weakened, it is followed by a loss of confidence in Scripture and skepticism regarding points of faith.<sup>110</sup> In 1890, during the confusion that resulted from the Minneapolis General Conference, she wrote:

Many study the Scriptures for the purpose of proving their own ideas to be correct. They change the meaning of God's word to suit their own opinions. And thus they do also with the testimonies that He sends. They quote half a sentence, leaving out the other half, which, if quoted, would show their reasoning to be false.<sup>111</sup>

White was still struggling with this issue ten years later. In 1900, she wrote that she was even afraid to speak with her friends for fear of being misquoted and/or misinterpreted. She began to think that God wanted her to stop speaking to large assemblies and avoid all private interviews because her counsel was being so grossly perverted.<sup>112</sup> Thus, even

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<sup>108</sup> White, "The Reception of the Messages," in Selected Messages, 3:81.

<sup>109</sup> White, "The Reception of the Messages," in Selected Messages, 3:83.

<sup>110</sup> White, "Evils of Lax Discipline" (Testimony 27, 1876), Testimonies, 4:211.

<sup>111</sup> White, "The Reception of the Messages," in Selected Messages, 3:82.

<sup>112</sup> White, "The Reception of the Messages," in Selected Messages, 3: 82-83.

during her lifetime, she was losing the battle against the legalistic/proof-text use of her counsel.

Those who use the proof-texting method generally assume verbal inspiration of the Bible and the Testimonies. At Minneapolis, Church leadership undermined its 1883 disavowal of verbal inspiration by their decision to ignore White's counsel. What would now prevent church members from selecting only those Testimonies which confirmed their personal opinions? This selection system would only work if verbal inspiration were assumed.

Thus while Adventists officially advocated the primacy of Scripture, by the time of her death in 1915, Ellen White was the acknowledged interpreter of Scripture for many Adventists. They used her visions and writings to clarify and elaborate the Scriptures, thus completing the shift in authority.<sup>113</sup> In effect, the Testimonies--the oral and written counsel that White gave to the church--were now the ultimate source of authority.<sup>114</sup>

This structure of authority remained intact from 1919 until the mid-1950s. According to Adventist writer, A Leroy Moore, during this period the church had an unchecked, unbalanced focus upon the law.<sup>115</sup> In the mid-1950s, the Adventist Church

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<sup>113</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 26, 28; George R. Knight, Anticipating the Advent: A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 106-07; and A. Leroy Moore, Adventism in Conflict: Resolving the Issues that Divide Us (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995), 127-30.

<sup>114</sup> Schwarz, 418, citing W. W. Prescott, "Transcript of the 1919 Bible Conference," 30 July 1919.

<sup>115</sup> Moore, 81, 127.

tried to rid itself of its legalistic image and to correct certain misconceptions regarding it. The Church tried to confirm its standing as a Christian church and not a heretical cult. It did so, in part, through a series of meetings with Donald Barnhouse, a Presbyterian minister from Philadelphia and editor of Eternity Magazine, and Walter Martin, a specialist on non-Christian cults who was preparing to write a book about Adventists. Barnhouse and Martin were especially anxious to know if Adventists put Ellen White's writings on the same level as the Bible, an accusation which Adventist scholars forcefully denied.<sup>116</sup> According to church historians Bull and Lockhart, Moore, and Knight, the implications of this denial alarmed many Adventists.<sup>117</sup>

Shortly after this external challenge, the church was faced with an internal one. The danger of using Mrs. White's writings in a proof-text fashion was made obvious during the church's extended theological controversy in the late 1950s and 1960s with Robert Brinsmead. Brinsmead was a college student in Australia when he began to cause considerable agitation in the Adventist Church in Australia and later in America with his unorthodox views which he supported with selected portions of Ellen White's writings. During this controversy, both sides tried to prove their point by citing cogent statements penned by White!<sup>118</sup>

In 1970, two Adventist academics, Roy Branson and Herold D. Weiss lamented the fact that Adventists used White's Testimonies to "make her voice blare out arguments

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<sup>116</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 28-29; and Schwarz, 544-45.

<sup>117</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 29; Moore, 83; and Knight, Fat Lady, 27.

<sup>118</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 29; and Schwarz, 456-60.

on both sides of a debate” or made “her march determinedly in opposite directions.”<sup>119</sup>

Branson and Weiss, knowing how the proof-text approach eliminated the need to use human reason and sensing that a high price would be paid if its use should continue, urged that Ellen White and her writings become “a subject for Adventist scholarship.”<sup>120</sup>

They put forward a set of proposals which they believed would yield a more accurate reading of White and a more consistent interpretation of her Testimonies. They proposed that the church (1) seek to discover the nature of Mrs. White’s relationship to other authors, (2) seek to discover the social and intellectual milieu in which she lived and wrote, and (3) give close attention to the development of Ellen White’s writings within her own lifetime, and also to the development of the church.<sup>121</sup>

Branson and Weiss anticipated multiple benefits to result if their suggestions were followed. They imagined that White would appear more vital and interesting; that while she would not agree with today’s readers any more than she did with her original readers, she would certainly be a more believable individual than the proof-text method insinuates she was; and White would be seen as less magical, awesome, obscure, and ignored. Thus, she would be more authoritative and influential.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Roy Branson and Herold D. Weiss, “Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship,” Spectrum, 2, no. 4 (autumn 1970): 30.

<sup>120</sup> Branson and Weiss, 30-33; and Bull and Lockhart, 29.

<sup>121</sup> Branson and Weiss, 31-32.

<sup>122</sup> Branson and Weiss, 32-33.



It appears that the three-step proposal of Branson and Weiss was not adopted by the church. Whether in response to the call of Branson and Weiss or for other reasons, Ellen White, her work, and her writings became the subject of close examination by various individuals. The research of the 1970s resurfaced facts that had been obscured. Many church members were surprised to learn that White had used human sources.<sup>123</sup> The fact that Adventists were surprised to learn that White had used sources indicates that the proponents of verbal inspiration of the Testimonies had succeeded in obscuring the fact that White had clearly stated that she sometimes quoted other writers.<sup>124</sup>

The 1980s saw reason brought to bear on White's theology as Adventist professor Desmond Ford questioned the theological significance of the Great Disappointment of 1844 as espoused by White.<sup>125</sup> The large following that Ford's ideas attracted suggests an erosion of the authority afforded her writings. Additionally, even though White repeatedly endorsed the message of righteousness by faith, Adventist scholars are still divided into camps regarding the roles of law and grace.<sup>126</sup> Johnsson, writing in The Fragmenting of Adventism, is pained at the thought of the message this polarization sends

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<sup>123</sup> John J. Robertson, The White Truth (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981), 11-14.

<sup>124</sup> Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan (1888; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), xi-xii.

<sup>125</sup> Bull and Lockhart, 29.

<sup>126</sup> Johnsson, 92-93.

today, to say nothing of the impact it has on the students these contemporary scholars are paid to teach.<sup>127</sup>

The generation of church members who paid the heaviest price for this legalistic attitude were the baby boomers. They were the ones who felt the full resurgence of this legalistic spirit in the late 1950s and 1960s. They heard it from their parents at home. They heard it from the pulpit at church. They heard it from their teachers as they attended church sponsored schools (from elementary to college). But what of their children? Would the children remain untouched by what was so persistently drilled into the fiber of their parents' religious being?

The children of the baby boom generation have not escaped. Today's Adventist youth question the relevance of the Bible and are especially loathe to engage the writings of Ellen White. Because her views have been distorted in a legalistic manner, the teachings are dismissed as not particularly valid or relevant to the present context. This situation leaves the youth of the church confused. Some observers warn that the church is on the brink of losing an entire generation unless concerted and deliberate action is taken soon.<sup>128</sup>

Using Valuegenesis data, Roger Dudley and V. Bailey Gillespie concluded that significant numbers of our youth have a legalistic view of spiritual life, a view that

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<sup>127</sup> Johnsson, 93.

<sup>128</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 269-70.

contributes to widespread despair and hopelessness.<sup>129</sup> Thus, though our youth have a good understanding of, and confidence in, the basic doctrines that define the denomination--the second coming of Jesus, the Sabbath, and the state of the dead-- they are ambivalent about their belief in other significant teachings, including the church's teachings about Ellen White.<sup>130</sup> As a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with James White and others, Ellen White's influence on the church's mission, identity, and doctrines was profound. The history of this church is so inextricably interwoven with the life, ministry, and writings of White that disengagement from her by the present generation of Adventist youth translates into declining denominational loyalty for the youth, and creates an identity crisis for the church. Perhaps the application of a dialogical hermeneutic for analyzing White's writings can provide an honest, defensible, and intellectually satisfying approach to her Testimonies.

### A Hermeneutical Path to Re-engagement

Hermeneutics is a discipline which "deals with the understanding of written, most often historically distant texts" and "designates the methods and conditions that enable the text to be responsibly interpreted for a contemporary audience."<sup>131</sup> We have already noted the three-step hermeneutical approach recommended by Branson and Weiss in 1970. Prior to this, in 1955, T. Housel Jemison had enunciated a three-step hermeneutic

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<sup>129</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 272-73.

<sup>130</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 273.

<sup>131</sup> John McCarthy, "Hermeneutics," in A New Handbook of Christian Theology, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 219-20.

that is still widely endorsed within the denomination.<sup>132</sup> Jemison maintained that these steps would help a reader to gain a balanced view of what White's Testimonies teach.

Those steps are:

1. The general teaching of all the applicable counsels should be studied before conclusions are drawn.
2. The time, place, and circumstances of the giving of certain messages should be considered.
3. One should try to discover the principle involved in any specific counsel, and its applications.<sup>133</sup>

The hermeneutical approach of Branson and Weiss, as well as that of Jemison, sought to avoid the problems associated with proof-texting. Nonetheless, the problem persists.

The church acknowledges that White's Testimonies continue to be abused by individuals using a faulty hermeneutic.<sup>134</sup>

We have already seen the effects of proof-texting and White's denunciation of that approach.<sup>135</sup> She urged people to read the Testimonies in context and to apply them as they were intended.<sup>136</sup> She recommended that students be taught to think for themselves and not be mere reflectors of other people's thoughts.<sup>137</sup> In spiritual matters, White counseled, "Allow no one to be brains for you, allow no one to do your thinking,

<sup>132</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Issues, 24-25.

<sup>133</sup> Jemison, Prophet, 437-49.

<sup>134</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Issues, 24.

<sup>135</sup> White, "The Reception of the Messages," in Selected Messages, 3:82.

<sup>136</sup> White, "Inspired Messages Wrongly Applied," in Selected Messages, 1:44.

<sup>137</sup> White, Education, 17-18.

your investigating, and your praying.”<sup>138</sup> The dialogical hermeneutic proposed in this dissertation repudiates proof-texting and encourages critical examination of sources and texts and personal application of the enduring principles. The hermeneutic described below requires dialogue between the reader and White, between White and other theorists, between White’s context and the contemporary context.

The steps in this dialogical hermeneutic are:

1. Identify the issue to be researched.
2. Gather White’s contributions where she deals with the issue comprehensively, avoiding isolated comments and proof-texting. Use compilations of her Testimonies to identify potential items of usefulness and to locate original sources where the passage can be read in the context in which it was originally intended.
3. Analyze White’s teaching in context—in its cultural and historical context, in relation to the whole corpus of her writings, and in relation to the present context—in search of her intended meaning and the underlying principles. Any approach that fails to consider all contextual issues jeopardizes the validity of White’s counsel.
4. Engage White in comparative analysis with other theorists to clarify, critique, expand, and/or reform her view.
5. Determine what is extraneous and what is enduring, and make decisions regarding how to appropriate White’s enduring teachings at the particular moment and in relation to the particular issue.

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<sup>138</sup> Ellen G. White, “Study the Bible for Yourselves,” Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 11 Sept. 1894, 577.

In the chapters that follow, this dialogical hermeneutic will be applied to White's position regarding parental influences on children's spiritual development. This is a key issue in Religious Education and White has given extensive counsel regarding it. The dialogue partners will be Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Alice Miller, and selected theorists of the socialization/enculturation model of spiritual development.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Faithful Parent/The Faithful Object

*Every man carries within himself a world made up of all that he has seen and loved; and it is to this that he returns, incessantly, though he may pass through, and seem to inhabit, a world quite foreign to it. [original italics]*

Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand, Voyage en Italie<sup>1</sup>

A principal objective of the religious education of children ought to be to equip them with the skills necessary to begin their own journey of faith.<sup>2</sup> Parental influences significantly impact the nature of this journey. This chapter, and those that follow, will use the issue of parental influences on the spiritual growth of children to illustrate how steps two through five of the dialogical hermeneutic can be applied. Each chapter will show how parental influences on children retard or enhance personal piety and relational involvement with God.

Chapter 2 lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters by (1) presenting White's concept of a faithful parent, (2) introducing the object relations concepts essential for understanding later chapters, (3) discussing the relationship between psychology and religion in an effort to clarify why a psychoanalytic concept is being used in dialogue with White, and (4) discussing the concept of object relations as a key to understanding the primacy of personal experience. This discussion will show that a person's ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome W. Berryman, "Faith Development and the Language of Faith," in Handbook of Children's Religious Education, ed. Donald E. Ratcliff (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1992), 28.

achieve and maintain a sense of self is profoundly impacted by personal experiences with parents--experiences that have life-long consequences.

### White's Concept of The Faithful Parent

The spiritual development and well-being of children was a matter close to the heart of Ellen White. No enterprise was more important than working for the spiritual welfare of children. All other duties were second to parental responsibilities for children. In 1890 she encouraged parents to be thorough in their work for children. She assured them that if they failed in all other earthly endeavors and yet sent forth from their homes pure and virtuous children who would serve God in some humble post, then their life work could never be called a failure.<sup>3</sup> While children's physical and mental development were items of concern for White, they came after her concern for children's spiritual and emotional health.

The purpose of this section is to present Ellen White's views on how parents serve as representatives of God to their children; to show how White holds parents responsible for the spiritual development of their children; to demonstrate that interaction with parents is the context in which children have their early, formative experiences; and to show how, according to White, these early experiences are determinative for spiritual development. Throughout this section, the reader will note that in White's thinking, there

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, Fundamentals of Christian Education: Instruction for the Home, the School, and the Church, compiled by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Department of Education (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 161.



is a seamless connection between the life experiences of children and their spiritual development.

White's counsel to parents was given from the mid-1840s up to her death in 1915. She communicated to parents in a number of ways, including sermons, magazine articles, and personal letters. She herself was the mother of four children. Because of the nature of her work, she and her husband were frequently separated from their children for extended periods of time. She felt the pain of this separation keenly, but placed the needs of her children above her own desire to have them on the road with her. She considered a stable home situation with firm, caring, consistent caregivers essential to the well-being of her children.<sup>4</sup>

When circumstances allowed, she cared for her own children as well as raised several others. She stated that she avoided showing annoyance, saying harsh words, or becoming impatient when dealing with her children. When she felt annoyed, her policy was to inform the child that they would discuss the issue later. Once she felt composed, she was able to deal with the situation calmly.<sup>5</sup>

White declared that parents are responsible to God for the welfare of their children for one very simple reason, "children are God's property."<sup>6</sup> Parents are to see themselves

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<sup>4</sup> White, Life Sketches, 110, 120, 131-32.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, Child Guidance (Manuscript 19, 1887), compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 253-55.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Work of Parents," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 24 June 1890, 385-86.

as guardians of their children and to keep in mind that it is their duty to train their children for God.<sup>7</sup> Hence, as God's trustees, parents warrant a degree of love and respect which is due to no other person. Inasmuch as God has personally given parents the responsibility for "the souls committed to their charge," so also has God "ordained that during the earlier years of life parents shall stand in the place of God to their children. And he who rejects the rightful authority of his parents is rejecting the authority of God."<sup>8</sup>

She was clear and unequivocal in her contention that parents are representatives of God to their children and equally clear in delineating the consequences associated with parenting, whether negative or positive. She asserted that "parents stand in the place of God to their children to tell them what they must do and what they must not do with firmness and self-control."<sup>9</sup> This issue of self-control permeates White's counsel to parents.

While White considered overt actions and words telling in their impact on children, she informed mothers that their thoughts and feelings would have a potent

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, "Words to Parents," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 18 Dec. 1900, 801.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 293.

<sup>9</sup> White, Adventist Home, 320.

influence on the legacy they gave to their children.<sup>10</sup> Any mother who was self-centered, possessing a peevish and exacting disposition, would see the fruit in the life of her children. According to White, these children would receive, as a birthright from the mother, tendencies to evil that would prove almost unconquerable.<sup>11</sup> Here spiritual development is compromised genetically.

Fathers did not escape responsibility. White added that both parents transmitted mental and physical characteristics as well as dispositions and appetites. She said that “every intemperate man who rears children transmits his inclinations and evil tendencies to his offspring” with each successive generation falling lower and lower.<sup>12</sup>

The work of parenting begins before the child is born. White was both persistent and insistent on this point. Pregnant women were to cultivate peaceful minds and pursue closeness with God. Husbands were to lighten the work load of their wives so that they would not become physically exhausted, giving in to anxiety and depression which would rob her children “of the vital force and of the mental elasticity and cheerful buoyancy they should inherit.”<sup>13</sup> Even the pregnant mother’s appetite was a subject of White’s concern.

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, Mind, Character, and Personality, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate, 2 vols. (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), 1:132.

<sup>11</sup> White, Mind, Character, 132.

<sup>12</sup> White, Mind, Character, 134-35.

<sup>13</sup> White, Mind, Character, 132-33.

She opined that innocent offspring suffer and “diseased children are born” in consequence of parental appetites going unrestrained.<sup>14</sup>

The tenor of White’s insights grows darker as she recited how parents, through indulgence, strengthen their “animal passions” to the detriment of moral and cognitive faculties; allowing the “brutish” to overwhelm their own spiritual sensitivities. “Thus children are born with the animal propensities largely developed,” with diminished “brain force” and deficient memory.<sup>15</sup>

We might do well to explain what White is saying here. She was quite exercised over what she called sexual excesses within marriage. She regretted the status of many Christian women who felt obliged to yield their bodies to their husband’s sexual obsessions which she declared to be more animal-like than human; more lustful than loving, mutual, and caring. She declared such husbands to be worse than brutes and demons in human form who know nothing of the principles of true love.<sup>16</sup> The beauty and dignity of the marriage bed was defiled repeatedly by what, in her estimation, was nothing short of rape. The offspring of such homes would not escape the influence of

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<sup>14</sup> White, Mind, Character, 133.

<sup>15</sup> White, Mind, Character, 136.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, “An Appeal to the Church” (Testimony 18, 1870), Testimonies, 2: 474.

such behavior.<sup>17</sup> Therefore the children who are born of such parents inherit from them mental qualities that are low and base.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the point has been made, yet so that the reader might know that White saw the various aspects of family life as interrelated and that her views on this matter have not been distorted by a clever reconstruction of her writings, two examples will be presented here. On June 6, 1863, White had a vision on the subject of health. Subsequent to that vision, she wrote a series of six articles for a pamphlet called "How to Live." The first example, written in 1865, was part of one of the six articles which was entitled "Disease and Its Causes."<sup>19</sup> White advised parents:

The first great object to be attained in the training of children is soundness of constitution which will prepare the way in a great measure for mental and moral training. Physical and moral health are closely united. What an enormous weight of responsibility rests upon parents when we consider that the course pursued by them before the birth of their children has very much to do with the development of their character after birth.<sup>20</sup>

The second example comes from an 1890 article entitled "Parental Responsibility," which first appeared in a pamphlet called "Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene." In the article White warned:

When parents and children meet in the final reckoning, what a scene will be presented! Thousands of children who have been slaves to appetite and debasing vice, whose lives are moral wrecks, will stand face-to-face with the parents who have made them what they are. Who but the parents must bear

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<sup>17</sup> White, "Sensuality in the Young" (Testimony 18, 1870), Testimonies, 2:390-02; and "An Appeal to the Church" (Testimony 18, 1870), Testimonies, 2:474-78.

<sup>18</sup> White, "An Appeal to the Church" (Testimony 18, 1870), Testimonies, 2:475.

<sup>19</sup> White, "Disease and Its Causes," Selected Messages, 2:410.

<sup>20</sup> White, "Disease and Its Causes," Selected Messages, 2:426.

this fearful responsibility? Did the Lord make these youth corrupt? Oh, no! Who, then, has done this fearful work? Were not the sins of the parents transmitted to the children in perverted appetites and passions? And was not the work completed by those who neglected to train them according to the pattern which God has given. Just as surely as they exist, all these parents will pass in review before God.<sup>21</sup>

White seemed reluctant to let the point go. In 1905 she lamented that parents still regarded prenatal influences as of little consequence. The matter had been presented to her by an angel of God and thus, it deserved very careful thought.<sup>22</sup>

An important issue for White was the determinative effects of early childhood experiences. White's emphasis on the potency of prenatal influences takes us one step further: she is saying that what the parents are determines what the children will become. By so saying, I am not intimating that what parents do in relation to their children is any less significant.

White places the work of the mother in a category above all others. The beauty of the mother's task is captured nicely in these lines: The mother

has not, like the artist, to paint a form of beauty upon canvas; nor, like the sculptor, to chisel it from marble. She has not, like the author, to embody a noble thought in words of power; nor like the musician, to express a beautiful sentiment in melody. It is hers, with the help of God, to develop in a human soul the likeness of the divine.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> White, Mind, Character, 1:140-41.

<sup>22</sup> White, Mind, Character, 1:131.

<sup>23</sup> White, Adventist Home, 237.

Only by working together could fathers and mothers hope to be successful in raising children who would love the Lord.<sup>24</sup> She urged fathers to help children with their work; to join with them in their play; to cultivate friendships with them, especially their sons; to blend affection with authority, and kindness and sympathy with firm restraint.<sup>25</sup> Though White had much to say to fathers regarding their duties in the home and to their children, most of her advice to parents was addressed to mothers, perhaps because she believed that during the earliest years of a child's life, the forming of the disposition should be committed principally to the mother who should be confident of the father's support.<sup>26</sup> At the time that White wrote this, a large percentage of women did not work outside of the home. The principle at play inside her advice suggests that successful homemaking required the cooperative efforts of both husband and wife. In situations where the father has primary responsibility for raising the children, the responsibilities White ascribed to the mother would then devolve upon the father; or in an extreme situation like that of Ellen and James White, the responsibility of raising the children would be transferred to other responsible caregivers. Henceforth, when the word "mother" is used by Ellen White in the following paragraphs, it should be understood to refer to the primary caregiver.

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<sup>24</sup> White, Adventist Home, 216.

<sup>25</sup> White, Adventist Home, 222.

<sup>26</sup> White, Adventist Home, 221.

White described mothers as agents of God commissioned to Christianize their families and asserted that, next to God, a mother's power for good is the strongest influence on earth.<sup>27</sup> She encouraged mothers to use their personal influence to elevate and bless their homes.<sup>28</sup> In White's thinking, mothers had a God-given duty to care for their children and to help them develop Christ-like characters.<sup>29</sup>

White recommended that parents first teach their children "that God is their Father" and that God is love. This lesson was not to be delayed until after the child could read and write and discuss; it was to be given in the earliest years.<sup>30</sup>

The tenor of the above statements leaves some doubt as to the age that such teaching would be effective, if by teaching we are to understand schooling and instruction. The fact that the schooling/instructional model of teaching is not here being recommended by White can be discerned when we exegete another statement she made on this point. She said that parents should teach infant, child, and youth of God's love.<sup>31</sup> The inclusion of the word "infant" would indicate that the teaching to be done is more by example than by precept.

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<sup>27</sup> White, Adventist Home, 235, 240.

<sup>28</sup> White, Fundamentals, 149.

<sup>29</sup> White, Adventist Home, 234; and Fundamentals, 149.

<sup>30</sup> White, Child Guidance, 487.

<sup>31</sup> White, Child Guidance, 487.



Formal instruction was to be added to actions as the child was able to comprehend and make use of it, yet the role of modeling was preferred. Christian principles were to be acted out; they were to be blended with the daily experience and instilled into the minds and hearts of children through words and actions.<sup>32</sup>

And how is the mother to accomplish this noble objective? White argued that this should be done through the mother's influence. The mother's faithful, heartfelt and persistent efforts--her looks, words, and actions will bear fruit in eternity.<sup>33</sup> The mother's thoughts and feelings will be transmitted to the child in perceptible and imperceptible ways.<sup>34</sup> White recognized that children are perceptive, that they quickly discern the patient voice from the harsh, impatient one, which causes the love and affection in their hearts to wilt. Thus, she cautioned Christian mothers not to drive their children from their presence by fretfulness and a lack of sympathizing love.<sup>35</sup>

White pleaded with parents to study carefully the dispositions and temperaments of their children. She even urged parents to try to meet the wants of children. In caring for the physical needs of children, parents have only just begun to do their work. White advised that children had mental needs which required skillful attention.<sup>36</sup> She declared

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<sup>32</sup> White, Adventist Home, 238.

<sup>33</sup> White, Adventist Home, 240.

<sup>34</sup> White, Adventist Home, 241.

<sup>35</sup> White, Adventist Home, 242.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen G. White, "Parents and Children," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 20 Jan. 1863, 59.

that all organs of the body are servants of the mind; that the mind is the capital of the body; that the mind is the contact point between humanity and the infinite God; and that parents needed to understand how the body affected the mind and how the mind affected the body.<sup>37</sup> It was essential that parents take the time to understand the laws by which the human organism worked.<sup>38</sup>

White reminded parents that, because children have sensitive and loving natures, they should be surrounded by cheerfulness, courtesy, and love that is expressed in looks, actions, and words.<sup>39</sup> She urged parents never to use coercive means to force religion on their children or to force their children into religion. Again, cheerfulness, Christian courtesy, and tender and compassionate sympathy were to be the means of attracting children to religion. Even so, parents were to require obedience and respect.<sup>40</sup> However, White warned parents that treating children in a harsh, unsympathetic manner would mean that the child's image of God would be marred.<sup>41</sup> The importance of looks, actions, and words in the spiritual development of children can be clarified by the psychoanalytic

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<sup>37</sup> White, "Close Confinement at School" (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:136.

<sup>38</sup> White, Education, 292.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen G. White, "Parent and Child," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 26 May 1910, 6.

<sup>40</sup> White, Adventist Home, 323.

<sup>41</sup> White, "Words to Parents," 65.

concept of object relations, but before that clarification is made, an examination of the essential features of the theory of object relations is necessary.

### The Essential Features of the Theory of Object Relations

The interaction that takes place between the self and internal and external objects is called object relations.<sup>42</sup> Object relations theory is a “broad-based theoretical development within psychoanalysis” which represents the coming together of several discoveries made in the clinical setting of psychoanalysis, or the study of early childhood development, family theory and ethology.<sup>43</sup>

Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell advise that the study of theories of object relations is complicated. It is complicated because the term “object relations” has been used in various contexts and with various connotations and denotations. The debate over the proper use of the term continues.<sup>44</sup> In this dissertation, the term will be used with reference to a person’s interactions with external people and internal images, and to show how the internal and external object worlds relate to each other.<sup>45</sup>

N. Gregory Hamilton points out that we have relationships with external people that involve love, hate, and rivalry, plus very complex relationships with images that exist

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<sup>42</sup> N. Gregory Hamilton, Self and Others: Object Relations Theory in Practice (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1988), 13.

<sup>43</sup> John McDargh, Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion: On Faith and the Imaging of God (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 13-14.

within our psyches. He maintains that even though human psychological development begins in an undifferentiated state where we are unable to separate ourselves from our environment, we gradually come to realize that we are relating to those who care for us. He suggests that this is a life-long process in mentally healthy people by which the self continuously incorporates into itself aspects of significant others and comes to attribute aspects of the self to those around it. In people who are mentally ill, this process may have become fixed in an extreme pattern which precludes the establishment of a stable identity or sense of self.<sup>46</sup> The study of these relationships has produced a dynamic body of knowledge called object relations theory. Thus Hamilton limits object relations theory to the study of experiences that healthy children, adults, and patients have with other real people and with mental images of people.<sup>47</sup> This dissertation takes the view that object relations impact all relationships, whether or not the people and their relationships are healthy.

Hamilton facilitates our understanding of the concept of object relations when he mentions that, in a grammatical sense, there exists a similarity between the psychological term object and the word object. He explains that object relations theory has the same structure as the prototypical sentence: subject, verb, and object; with the self being the

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<sup>46</sup> Hamilton, 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Hamilton, 4.

subject, loving or hating or whatever action one chooses being the verb, and whatever is loved or hated serving as the object.<sup>48</sup>

“An object is a person, place, thing, idea, fantasy, or memory invested with emotional energy (love or hate or more modulated combinations of love and hate). An external object is a person, place, or thing invested with emotional energy. An internal object is an idea, fantasy, or memory pertaining to a person, place, or thing.”<sup>49</sup> According to Hamilton, Freud introduced and used the term object because he had observed how people related to things (objects) as though those things “were a sexual partner or loved one.”<sup>50</sup> Thus it was a matter of convenience to use the word object to denote anything that had been invested with emotion, whether that thing was a person, an inanimate object, a fantasy, or an idea.<sup>51</sup>

Object representations are one form of large mental processes which are stimulated by a child’s interaction with other people and things.<sup>52</sup> These mental processes involve: a child’s memory of a particular experience or series of experiences; a child’s fantasy about the experiences; and a child’s interpretation of the experiences and formation of a mental picture of itself and the person or persons with whom the

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<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Hamilton, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Hamilton, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 75, 54.

experiences were shared.<sup>53</sup> These mental pictures, called representations, are the end product of past experiences which are stored, coded, processed and retrieved.<sup>54</sup>

John McDargh advises that while object relations theory incorporates a revision of some of Sigmund Freud's work, it ought not be considered a "discrete school within psychoanalytic thought."<sup>55</sup> He considers object relations theory to be a wide-ranging development within psychoanalytic theory which has moved away from drive models of mental activity (particularly characteristic of early Freud) to using Freud's ideas regarding "personal relationship as the matrix within which the human psyche is formed."<sup>56</sup>

A review of one of Freud's ideas regarding the origin of religion illustrates how object relations theory is thought to work. Freud tells us that defending itself against the superior forces of nature is the major task facing civilization.<sup>57</sup> In Freud's thinking, the individuals making up a particular unit of civilization were faced with the task of conceptualizing, coping with, neutralizing, and/or overcoming nature and

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<sup>53</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 75-77.

<sup>54</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 56.

<sup>55</sup> McDargh, Psychoanalytic Object Relations, 17.

<sup>56</sup> McDargh, Psychoanalytic Object Relations, 17.

<sup>57</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 19-20.

Fate. He said that religion originated because children were helpless against such powers.<sup>58</sup>

In Freud's scheme, children cope with these external insecurities by using mental processes to turn the forces of nature into persons. Then these anthropomorphized forces are given the character of a father who, in turn, is turned into god/s. These gods are required to chase away the terrors of nature, reconcile humanity to the cruelty of fate, and hopefully, "compensate for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on" us.<sup>59</sup> Subsequently, these gods are condensed into one divine being with whom we can have intense and intimate relations.<sup>60</sup> The psychic material from which this god is constructed is gleaned from mental images of the father.<sup>61</sup> Thus Freud considered the creation of the gods to be a deliberate act of the human mind in its attempt to cope with the inexplicable, a psychic process impacted by prior relationships with a father.

McDargh identifies five incipient Freudian insights that have been developed and put forward by the concept of object relations, and which, in his thinking, have considerable potential significance for the study of religion. They are:

- 1) the unparalleled importance of the character of early parent-child interaction for the future development of personality and psychic structure, 2)

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<sup>58</sup> Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 207.

<sup>59</sup> Freud, Future, 21-22.

<sup>60</sup> Freud, Future, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Freud, Future, 30.

the potential value for adaptation of so-called “regressive” phenomena, 3) the primacy of relation-seeking throughout life, 4) the central significance over the entire life cycle of fantasy and the imaginative processes, and 5) the “immortal character of our significant early relationships through the memorializing functions of the human psyche.”<sup>62</sup>

These insights, or variations of them, will be seen at work throughout this dissertation.

David Benner, citing Ron Schafer, claims that the beginnings of object relations theory can be found in Freud. He lists “three main features of the embryonic object relations theory held by Freud: (1) our earliest involvement with family members has a lasting influence on subsequent relationships; (2) this influence is mediated by *imagos* of these significant people; and (3) these *imagos* may be transformed but never destroyed” [original emphasis].<sup>63</sup>

Now that we have established that object relations are the interactions of the self and objects, both internal and external, it is useful to know that Hamilton believes that self-representations and object-representations exist in relationships, not independent of each other.<sup>64</sup> According to him, these relationships are known as “object relations units” and consist of a self-representation, an internal object representation, and drive, or affect, such as love, hate, or hunger which connect the two.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> McDargh, Psychoanalytic Object Relations, 3.

<sup>63</sup> David C. Benner, “The Functions of Faith: Religious Psychodynamics in Multiple Personality Disorder,” in Object Relations Theory and Religion: Clinical Applications, eds. Mark Finn and John Gartner (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 35.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, 13, 20.



The earliest object relations unit “is a symbiotic self-object (the most undifferentiated self-object) in which the distinction between self and object is not clear.”<sup>66</sup> All other object relations evolve from this completely undifferentiated self-object.<sup>67</sup> Hamilton avers that mental life begins here; that symbiosis is the “matrix out of which our very selves emerge”; that “symbiosis is a psychological state during which self and other are fused in a warm” loving state;<sup>68</sup> that a sense of the self and a “stable sense of reality” require the existence of an external object; that if a person is isolated from external objects, he/she will revert to a state similar to symbiosis where it is not possible to distinguish between the self and anything else; and that our very selves would disintegrate in the absence of both external and internal objects.<sup>69</sup>

Our sense of who we are in relation to others dawns in infancy and evolves in the give-and-take that is part of all social relationships with those about us.<sup>70</sup> Psychoanalyst W. W. Meissner advances the idea that a child’s mental world forms over time “through

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<sup>66</sup> Hamilton, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, 20. To the contrary, Daniel Stern argues that some senses of self -- such as senses of agency, physical cohesion, continuity in time, and having intentions in mind -- exist prior to self-awareness and language. By “sense,” Stern says that he means “simple (non-self-reflexive) awareness.” Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology (New York: HarperCollins, Basic Books, 1985), 6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, 15, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Hamilton, 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Hamilton, 33.

the child's evolving developmental experience."<sup>71</sup> He explains that the nature of the developmental experience is affected by a social response called internalization.<sup>72</sup> It appears that the child first seeks to please (compliance); then it tries to be like the caregiver (identification); and lastly, the child wants to be right. The child's desire to be in right relation with the person/s caring for it by doing the right thing at the right time, causes it to internalize (incorporate into its own mental structure) basic characteristics of the caregiver (object).<sup>73</sup> The internalized traits bear a striking resemblance to the caregiver's, and they tend to become permanent, resistant to change, and no longer functioning as an external force; they now work from inside the child's own psyche as a personal possession.<sup>74</sup> There are various theories of how these relationships develop and impact the child.

Melanie Klein maintains that infants turn to their mothers for all of their needs from the very beginning of life; this initial bond "contains the fundamental elements of an object relation."<sup>75</sup> For Klein, object relations begin almost at birth, precipitated by the

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<sup>71</sup> W. W. Meissner, Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 18.

<sup>72</sup> Meissner, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Max Fogiel, The Psychology Problem Solver (Piscataway, N.J.: Research and Education Association, 1989), 619-20.

<sup>74</sup> Fogiel, 620; and Meissner, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Melanie Klein, "A Study of Envy and Gratitude," in The Selected Melanie Klein, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Free Press, 1986), 211.

first feeding experience of the infant.<sup>76</sup> The mother's breast is the child's first object and it constitutes the core of the child's ego and subsidizes its growth and integration.<sup>77</sup>

Acknowledging the importance of children's early experiences, she adds that a child is assisted in overcoming its early anxieties through good relations to both its mother and its external environment.<sup>78</sup>

W. R. D. Fairbairn suggests that a child's first experience of a love relationship is the child's relationship with its mother in the context of nursing.<sup>79</sup> All future relationships with objects of love will be set on this foundation. This oral relationship with the mother is not only the child's first exposure to a social relationship, but also the ground of that child's attitude to society.<sup>80</sup> Fairbairn intimates that fathers also play a major role in the healthy psycho-social development of children; he argues that the greatest needs of children are proof positive that they are truly loved as persons by their parents and that their love is accepted by their parents.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Klein, "The Psycho-analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance," in Selected Melanie Klein, 52.

<sup>77</sup> Klein, "A Study of Envy and Gratitude," in Selected Melanie Klein, 215. Klein alleges that the breast is instinctively felt to be both the source of nourishment and the source of life (p. 211).

<sup>78</sup> Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," in Selected Melanie Klein, 141.

<sup>79</sup> W. Ronald D. Fairbairn, Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality (London: Routledge, 1994), 24.

<sup>80</sup> Fairbairn, 10, 24-25.

<sup>81</sup> Fairbairn, 39.

Fairbairn argues that the infant is unconditionally dependent on the object for its existence and physical maintenance, as well as for its psychological needs; mature persons are conditionally dependent.<sup>82</sup> Thus the loss of the object for an infant is likely to be more significant than for a mature person.<sup>83</sup>

Fairbairn confesses that nobody is fortunate enough to experience a perfect object-relationship during either the plastic period of infantile dependence or the transitional phase which follows it.<sup>84</sup> For children, a relationship with a bad object is as intolerable as it is shameful,<sup>85</sup> and especially so because children internalize all objects, good and bad.<sup>86</sup> This incorporation of the bad object is unavoidable because the child is seeking to establish satisfactory relationships with objects.<sup>87</sup>

Fairbairn rejects the notion that the child's relationship to objects is driven by the pleasure principle. Since the child lacks experience with reality, its behavior is likely to be more impulsive, more emotional, and less controlled than the behavior of an adult. In pursuit of its object, the human child, "actuated by a reality sense," is as persistent as an

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<sup>82</sup> Small children are unconditionally dependent because of their helplessness. Mature persons have access to resources that are somewhat independent of others. Fairbairn, 47.

<sup>83</sup> Fairbairn, 47.

<sup>84</sup> Fairbairn, 56.

<sup>85</sup> Fairbairn, 63.

<sup>86</sup> Fairbairn, 65.

<sup>87</sup> Fairbairn, 138.

animal that operates on clear, fixed patterns set by instincts. Yet the path to the object is not as clear for the human child as it is for the animal, hence the child could lose its way.<sup>88</sup>

Fairbairn's recasting of psychoanalytic thought possesses one central principle: "that all parts of the ego are always connected to objects, to internalizations of significant persons, experiences, or things."<sup>89</sup> Fairbairn points out that "any theory of ego-development that is to be satisfactory must be conceived in terms of relationships with objects, and in particular relationships with objects which have been internalized during early life under the pressure of deprivation and frustration."<sup>90</sup>

In summary, in a broad sense, the term object relations refers to complete theories or certain aspects of theories that examine the relationship between real people, mental pictures of those real people, memories of encounters with those real people, and the importance of all of this to psychic functioning.<sup>91</sup>

Can anything be gained by using object relations theory as a means of understanding White? Does the historic antagonism between religion and psychoanalysis prevent meaningful dialogue?

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<sup>88</sup> Fairbairn, 140.

<sup>89</sup> Kathleen Greider, quoted in Syllabus for PC445, "Object Relations Theory and Theology," Claremont School of Theology (Fall 1995), 4.

<sup>90</sup> Fairbairn, 162.

<sup>91</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 12.

### Examining the Relationship between Religion and Psychoanalysis

Resorting to the use of psychoanalytic concepts in an examination of issues pertaining to Seventh-day Adventism may appear to many Adventists as unsound. To some it may appear that the writer is like the prodigal son who has gone off into the far country of atheistic ideas where he will waste his substance and bring shame on the family name. While I concur with John Westerhoff's assertion that "dependence upon the practice, rhetoric, and norms of secular psychology and pedagogy is risky business," I also believe that some risks ought to be taken if we are to address some of the problems facing our church today.<sup>92</sup> I will utilize insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology, theology, and psychoanalysis, knowing that the psychoanalytic critique of religious experience has not always been complimentary.<sup>93</sup>

The negative nature of the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion is cogently summarized by psychoanalyst W. W. Meissner. He admits that the record of the dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion is full of mutual antagonism.<sup>94</sup> He

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<sup>92</sup> John Westerhoff, III, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 21. Westerhoff does not explain why he considers the secular disciplines risky other than complaining that "the ways of secular education" are too easily linked with religion.

<sup>93</sup> I concur with anthropologist Clifford Geertz's suggestion that, if we are to have a more complete understanding of human existence, we need to "formulate meaningful propositions embodying findings" from biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors. Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: HarperCollins, Basic Books, 1973), 44.

<sup>94</sup> Meissner, vii.

confesses that, historically, psychoanalysis has tended to see religious experience in “psychopathological terms,” placing emphasis on the unconscious and irrational aspects of religious experience and practice.<sup>95</sup> Religious and theological thinking, on the other hand, are guilty of failing to consider human drives and needs while choosing to place emphasis on our supernatural potential and “the life of the spirit.”<sup>96</sup>

Meissner regrets these historical realities, characterizing them as unfortunate--unfortunate because the past was full of “mistakes, misunderstandings, misconstructions, and even plain paranoid distortions on both sides . . . .”<sup>97</sup> Meissner reports that when dealing with aspects of religious experience, theological accounts tended to be psychologically naive while the psychological attempts to comprehend religious experience were theologically naive in most cases and, in some cases, ignorant.<sup>98</sup> He laments that, in spite of the fact that they need each other, these two disciplines (psychoanalysis and theology) “seem unable or unwilling to collaborate in their mutually implicating and potentially enriching enterprises.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Meissner, vii.

<sup>96</sup> Meissner, vii.

<sup>97</sup> Meissner, 13.

<sup>98</sup> Meissner, 13.

<sup>99</sup> Meissner, 13. Meissner believes that these two need each other because “while theological reflection cannot take place without a presumptive underlying anthropology, it is equally true that the psychological attempt to understand religious experience will remain naive and misguided unless it is informed to a significant degree by theology.” Meissner, 13.

Being aware of the negative nature of the historical relationship between psychoanalysis and religion is important, yet it does not oblige us to remain negative, nor should it prevent us from taking advantage of the rich potential of dialogue. Benner maintains that the work of Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) and John McDargh (1983) regarding God representations demonstrate how useful object relations theory is to the potential development of a psychoanalytic psychology of religion.<sup>100</sup> He adds that Meissner's use of object relations theory to show how religious experience possesses potential for psychological growth and healing is additional proof that object relations theory has rich potential for "fertile applications."<sup>101</sup>

Benner contends "that a more balanced and comprehensive psychoanalytic theory of religion may be beginning to emerge."<sup>102</sup> He reports that Hans Loewald had noted this possibility in 1978. According to Benner, Loewald felt that psychoanalysis, instead of continuing to reject the genuine validity of religious experience, might be at a point where it could help us understand religious experience. Benner insists that responsible persons no longer characterize religion as always pathological nor as always constructive. For Benner, religion possesses both constructive and pathological components.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Benner, 36.

<sup>101</sup> Benner, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Benner, 36.

<sup>103</sup> Benner, 36.



Mark Finn and John Gartner assure us that both psychoanalysis and religion are passionately concerned about the nature of loving and hating. Yet, they too, admit that a less-than-friendly history exists. They rejoice that a door has been opened to rapprochement between psychoanalysis and religion by the family of object relations theory which calls attention to the importance of early relationships. Thus, they hope that under “friendlier intellectual circumstances,” religious life can again become a focus of psychoanalytic discussion.<sup>104</sup>

I deduce that object relations theories based on the interpersonal tradition can be used to clarify the role of religion in human life because they understand the content of human passions and conflicts to rise out of the dynamic configurations comprised of “relations between the self and others, real and imagined.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, sharing Finn and Gartner’s optimistic assessment of the potential contributions object relations theory can make to the understanding of religious experience, and in full agreement with St. Augustine’s maxim that “true religion is true psychology, and true psychology, in turn, is true religion . . . ,”<sup>106</sup> I will venture into the “far country” with the hope of finding a way to reconcile Adventist youth to their parents, to God, to the church, and to the writings of Ellen White.

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<sup>104</sup> Finn and Gartner, vii.

<sup>105</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 80.

<sup>106</sup> Finn and Gartner, viii-ix.

I know that “it is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” and that “it is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.”<sup>107</sup> This dissertation in no way puts human wisdom and insights before God, but it seeks to take advantage of the insights that God has given us through these diverse disciplines, especially the psychoanalytic concept of object relations which emphasizes the importance of early childhood experiences.

### Object Relations as a Key to Understanding the Primacy of Personal Experience

The psychoanalytic concept of object relations is especially useful in the discussion of children’s spiritual development inasmuch as it helps to clarify the dynamics operating within the human psyche and the importance of personal experience, as introduced by the Chateaubriand observation which appears at the beginning of this chapter. This quotation embodies the substance of object relations theory which alleges that the experiences of life, especially the earliest ones, provide the material out of which an entire world is created within the human psyche--an inner world that profoundly impacts the individual’s relationship to external realities, perhaps determining that relationship. In this sense, and for this reason, I consider early life experiences to be determinative, as is insinuated by Geertz, who maintains that we are born with the natural capacity “to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Psalm 118:8, 9, AV.

<sup>108</sup> Geertz, 45.

That one life lived is significantly influenced by experiences the self shares with other people.<sup>109</sup>

These experiences will facilitate the child's psycho-social development, from normal to pathological, and the creation of self and object images from positive to negative. The work of Liberation theologian Paulo Freire illustrates both the importance of personal experience and how the negative image of the object impacts the image of the self. Freire reports that oppressed people are conditioned and shaped by the contradictions of their existential situation, so much so, that these oppressed masses internalize the image of the oppressors and adopt their way of being.<sup>110</sup> Freire maintains that the consciousness of the oppressed is submerged into that of the oppressors.<sup>111</sup>

Curiously, the oppressed are drawn towards the oppressors and their way of life, passionately wanting to resemble, to imitate, to follow them. The oppressed are guilty of self-depreciation. They consider themselves ignorant. They believe that there is no

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<sup>109</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell provide an acceptable explanation of how this process works. While explaining the interpersonal theory of Harry Stack Sullivan, they note that, according to Sullivan, the human personality: develops from relations with other people; is made up of relations with those people; and is revealed only in the "context of interpersonal relationship." Thus, they conclude that all of the contents of the human mind have been put there by the same interpersonal relations with the exception of "the capacities to receive *and elaborate* [original emphasis] the relevant experiences." Greenberg and Mitchell, 101.

<sup>110</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1993), 27-29.

<sup>111</sup> Freire, 33.

difference between themselves and animals, and they are emotionally dependent.<sup>112</sup>

Why? Experiences with other people, relations with people (objects) - have taught them this way of being human.

Feminist theology provides a most cogent presentation of the importance of experience, as well as examples of what can happen when experience is depreciated and/or ignored. Rebecca Chopp reports that the most recent versions of feminist theology have their origins in the inability (or maybe, unwillingness) of contemporary theology "to represent woman's experience . . . ."<sup>113</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether adds that while feminist theology and hermeneutics consider women's experience to be a source of knowledge, it is not really clear what this means.<sup>114</sup> The explanation she gives for this assessment will clarify what she means, as well as assist me in clarifying what is meant when I refer to personal experience. Ruether alleges that traditional theology generally assumes that human experience (contaminated by sinful impulses) is a subjective source of ideas that is no match for the objectivity of scripture which presents the "Word of God." Thus, it would be impertinent "to suggest that 'women's experience' can be used to judge scripture and theological tradition."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Freire, 44-47.

<sup>113</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 25.

<sup>114</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 111.

<sup>115</sup> Ruether, 111.

Ruether recognizes that such an attitude is culpable on at least two counts: it trivializes women as persons, and it fails to understand the role human experience played in the formation of scripture and theological tradition. She understands human experience to be both the starting and ending point in the circle of interpretation. Ruether explains that experience includes encounters with the divine, with one's self, with others, and with the world. She resents the tendency of tradition to "dictate both what is experienced and how it may be interpreted."<sup>116</sup> She argues that symbols, laws, and rituals should have validity and influence over people only if and when they give meaning to experience. I concur with her when she adds that symbols die when they fail to speak to experience, that they should be thrown aside or modified to provide new meaning.<sup>117</sup>

Why is this important to Seventh-day Adventist leaders and parents? Why should they care about personal experience and whether or not it is critical? They should care because "traditions die when a new generation is no longer able to reappropriate the foundational paradigm in a meaningful way."<sup>118</sup> The Adventist tradition and its method of interpreting scripture is so deeply influenced by Ellen White that the current disengagement from her writings by contemporary Adventist youth could translate into declining denominational loyalty, and create an identity crisis for the church. They

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<sup>116</sup> Ruether, 111.

<sup>117</sup> Ruether, 111.

<sup>118</sup> Ruether, 112.

should care because personal experience is important; life's meaning arises out of experience. Experience generates a hermeneutic which informs each person's theology; that theology determines an individual's readiness to appropriate the foundational paradigm of their religious community.

An explanation has been given as to why it is essential to understand the importance of personal experience. Let us now turn to the theory of object relations to see how it can help us understand the nature of our experiences and their importance.

Insights of John McDargh will be used to demonstrate how object relations theory makes the case regarding the importance of personal experience. McDargh would have us believe that the most significant discovery and insight given to us by object relations theorists is that whatever humans mean by the word "meaning," we must look for the origin of meaning in the essential psycho-social processes by which human beings become selves, "separate and yet bound, distinct and yet related."<sup>119</sup> McDargh intimates that it does not matter whether the language used to describe meaning is secular or religious, the meaning that matters for humans is related to satisfying the basic human desire "*to be* [original emphasis] -- which for human beings means to-be-in-relationship."<sup>120</sup>

The search for meaning is a basic human undertaking. McDargh claims that the craving for meaning is an innate desire, that people long to experience themselves as

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<sup>119</sup> John McDargh, "The Deep Structure of Religious Representations," in Object Relations Theory and Religion: Clinical Applications, eds. Mark Finn and John Gartner (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 5.

<sup>120</sup> McDargh, "Deep Structure," 5.

“vitaly alive” and capable of evoking emotionally gratifying recognition and responses from their world.<sup>121</sup> This desire for meaning is so much a part of the person that McDargh calls it “preadaptive readiness.”<sup>122</sup> The realization of the desire to be, to be alive, to be in relationship, is not something that a person can give to themselves. It is a gift of patterned interactions between a child and those caregivers into whose company it is born.<sup>123</sup> According to McDargh, the core issue of human development is the question of whether or not the environment into which a child is born can ultimately be trusted to receive it, respond to it, and mirror its initiatives and readiness to receive as well as to give love.<sup>124</sup>

The manner in which this question is answered or experienced by the child will shape that child’s faith, “which is primarily carried forward as a preconceptual, somatic experience of the quality and character” of the child’s physical existence in the world.<sup>125</sup> Thus the case is made for the primacy of personal experience, experience that appears determinative.

If, as you were reading above, you began to wonder if there was any place for human agency or the exercise of personal will, your concern is well-founded. Meissner

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<sup>121</sup> McDargh, “Deep Structure,” 5.

<sup>122</sup> McDargh, “Deep Structure,” 5.

<sup>123</sup> McDargh, “Deep Structure,” 5.

<sup>124</sup> McDargh, “Deep Structure,” 5.

<sup>125</sup> McDargh, “Deep Structure,” 5.

concedes that in the theological image of humans, “the primacy of freedom is a fundamental given.”<sup>126</sup> The opposite is true for psychoanalysts with whom human freedom is not a given, nor is freedom basic to their concept of being human. As theology presumes freedom in human actions, psychoanalysis presumes the lack of freedom.<sup>127</sup> To the average psychoanalyst, freedom is always a goal, but is at best fragile and limited.<sup>128</sup> When viewed in this light, it is easy to agree with critics of object relations theory that it presents humans as passive vehicles for cultural values or blank slates on which social norms are written.<sup>129</sup> It is possible to come away feeling like we are “nothingbut”<sup>130</sup> social constructs, as described by logotherapist Victor Frankl.

Frankl took exception to the theory that humanity was “nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity or environment.”<sup>131</sup> He believed, and I concur, that there was danger inherent in teaching humanity’s nothingbutness. Frankl took exception to this point of view because he believed that it gives the neurotic person a good excuse to go on believing themselves to be the victim of outer influences or inner circumstances. He labeled this “neurotic

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<sup>126</sup> Meissner, 224.

<sup>127</sup> Meissner, 224.

<sup>128</sup> Meissner, 225.

<sup>129</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 80.

<sup>130</sup> This term is borrowed from logotherapist Victor Frankl.

<sup>131</sup> Viktor Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning, [trans. Ilse Lasch] (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), 153.



fatalism” and he believed that it was fostered by a psychotherapy that denied human freedom.<sup>132</sup>

Frankl agrees that a human being is a finite entity with restricted freedom. The freedom that he speaks of is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions. While he conceded that humans are to some degree subject to biological, psychological and sociological conditions, he maintained that we still possess the power to take a stand towards any circumstances,<sup>133</sup> that human energy is not spent in the search for pleasure or the avoidance of pain, rather it is spent in the search for meaning.

Frankl’s experiences as a prisoner during the Second World War led him to conclude that the salvation of a person is through love and in love. He came to understand how a person who has nothing left in the world still may know bliss, be it only for the briefest of moments, in the contemplation of their beloved. He explained how, when in a situation of utter desolation, when it is not possible to express oneself in overt ways and when one’s only achievement may consist in enduring sufferings in an honorable way, a person may, through loving contemplation of the image they carry of their beloved, achieve fulfillment.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Frankl, 153.

<sup>133</sup> Frankl, 153-54.

<sup>134</sup> Frankl, 57.

Whether his wife was alive or dead was no longer critical, because Frankl believed that love went beyond the physical person of the beloved.<sup>135</sup> It was the memory of her that was efficacious and nurturing. The memory of his wife helped him to salvage his self-respect and sense of self, a sense that had been developed early in his life.

Ana-Maria Rizzuto declares that we need our objects throughout life. Citing Margaret Mahler, Rizzuto adds that the warp and woof of our psychic structure is made from them and we are enmeshed with them all the way to our grave.<sup>136</sup> Calling to consciousness memories of past objects and representations of the self contribute to our becoming a self.<sup>137</sup>

Rizzuto moves forward in the life cycle by saying that object representations not only contribute to our becoming a self, they are also an essential part of that memorial process constantly utilized by the individual in the process of remaining a self. More than recall is at work here. This maintaining of one's self requires interpreting and reconstructing.<sup>138</sup> Why? When the circumstances of life have lowered our self-esteem,<sup>139</sup> either deliberately or unintentionally, we call back these representational memories to the psychic forum so that they can assist us in regrounding our sense of self. Thus, as the

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<sup>135</sup> Frankl, 58.

<sup>136</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 53.

<sup>137</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 57.

<sup>138</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 75.

<sup>139</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 56.

“other” helped me to become me, so in times of identity crisis, the “other” is called to mind to help me preserve or maintain my sense of value and personhood.

Rizzuto mentions the protective functions of object representations at times of life crisis or object loss in which good object representations supply the self with love and reconfirmation in compensation for disappointments in reality.<sup>140</sup> She pushes this point further by saying that it is not the representation itself which helps the person in times of crisis, it is the actual person, in memory, who offers reconfirmation and solace.<sup>141</sup>

So Frankl survived the horrors of the concentration camp, in part, by memories of his beloved wife. Though she was dead, the wife was still a blessing to him because, according to Rizzuto, memories of objects and representations cannot be destroyed.<sup>142</sup> Since objects are immortal in psychic reality, there can be no thoroughgoing object loss.<sup>143</sup> In Frankl’s view, the “other” was valuable in helping him maintain and preserve a sense of self in the face of constant, deliberate attacks against his personhood. Memories of the “other” gave him a sense of hope, purpose, and resolve--a reason to be, a reason to search for meaning.

In the end, the potency of personal experience is confirmed by Frankl’s testimony. The love he had shared with his wife, experiences of unselfish giving and receiving were

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<sup>140</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 69.

<sup>141</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 70.

<sup>142</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 79.

<sup>143</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 78.

remembered. Without the experiences, there would be no memories, and without the memories, the self would not have survived.

But that raises a question: In regard to this self, this sense of personhood that Frankl was so desperate to preserve, what was its origin? Where did it come from? Rizzuto helps us to understand the role that objects (other people) and memories (experiences) have played in our becoming the self who we know ourselves to be and our ability to maintain that sense of self amid the vicissitudes of life. We now turn our attention to her theory and to a comparative analysis with White to clarify, critique, expand, and/or reform White's views.

## CHAPTER 3

### Parents, Parenting, and Representations of God

The task of teaching religion to children demands exquisite attention to the experience of the child as well as to what is presented to him. Such care is necessary because each child will make a different use of God and create his private version of him according to the nature of his experiences and needs.

Ana-Maria Rizzuto<sup>1</sup>

Rizzuto's call to give close attention to children's personal experiences reminds the Seventh-day Adventist Church of a very similar call from its own prophetess, Ellen White. We recall from chapter two that White urges parents to consider seriously their responsibility as representatives of God to their children. She counsels them to begin during infancy, when the heart is impressionable, to instruct by word and example.<sup>2</sup> She places greater emphasis on example, reminding parents that God desires them to be "the embodiment of the principles laid down in his Word."<sup>3</sup> The time has come for the church to pay close attention to the experiences of its children. This chapter will demonstrate why children's personal experiences demand such careful attention.

The purposes of this chapter are (1) to introduce Ana-Maria Rizzuto's theory of how children form representations of God, (2) to explore her concept of parents as a source of God representations, (3) to examine the role of personal experience in Rizzuto's theory, and (4) to compare and critique White and Rizzuto regarding God concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 211.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, "Family Government is to Be Maintained," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 13 March 1894, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, "A Godly Example in the Home," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 12 Oct. 1911, 3-4.

### Rizzuto's Theory of How Children Form God Representations

Why does a child create a God representation, or a mental construct called God?

Rizzuto considers religion to be one of the most effective “regulatory structures of organized social life.”<sup>4</sup> According to her, creating a God representation is a natural adaptive response to culture.<sup>5</sup> It is the child's adaptive skills at work in the interest of participating in and adapting to one's native culture. Rizzuto, appealing to cultural and social anthropology, appears to be standing on solid ground when she takes this position.

Rizzuto's theory of how children form God representations reveals that she has been influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, but not so overwhelmed by his keen insights that she could not chart her own course when the evidence of her research indicated that she should. Freud maintains that development beyond the oral instinct has two aims. Those aims point to the role of objects, and also reveal that Rizzuto is operating within the spirit of Freud's psychoanalytic insights. Freud claims:

the abandonment of auto-eroticism, the replacement of the subject's own body once more by an outside object, and secondly, the unification of the various objects of the separate instincts and their replacement by a single object. This can, of course, only be achieved if the object is again a whole body, similar to the subject's own.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 90.

<sup>5</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 408. Eroticism as used by Freud includes, but goes beyond, sensual, physical arousal.

In saying this, Freud implies that healthy development requires a child to stop arousing itself and learn to be excited by outside objects. The child's mind condenses these objects into a single representation which resembles the child's own self and its mother. Thus, for Freud, finding object representations is an issue of "attachment" and an essential building block of the developing psyche of the child.<sup>7</sup>

Rizzuto posits that "no child in the Western world brought up in ordinary circumstances completes the oedipal cycle without forming at least a rudimentary God representation."<sup>8</sup> Rizzuto, a psychoanalyst, maintains the following:

1. All humans have the capacity to represent and symbolize.<sup>9</sup> (I assume that Rizzuto is referring to developmentally normal humans.)
2. It is unclear when the capacity to represent appears or becomes functional.<sup>10</sup>
3. The significance of self- and object representation is beyond question since objects provide the substance and structure for all mental activity.<sup>11</sup>
4. God is a special type of object representation created by children.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Freud, Introductory Lectures, 408-09.

<sup>8</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 200.

<sup>9</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 182.

<sup>10</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 183.

<sup>11</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 177.

5. This special representation is created in the psychic space where things like teddy bears and blankets get their power and come to life.<sup>13</sup>

6. Teddy bears and blankets are transitional objects which become less important with the passing of time.<sup>14</sup> These transitional objects are things which are not part of the child's body.<sup>15</sup>

7. God is a special transitional object inasmuch as God is created by children from mental material that is gleaned from "representations of primary objects" and God's importance is usually constant throughout life; in fact, there are times when God's importance may actually increase.<sup>16</sup>

8. As a transitional object, God cannot be fully repressed,<sup>17</sup> and remains accessible for further acceptance or rejection.<sup>18</sup>

9. The God representation should be updated throughout life if it is to be of value in times of developmental crisis or in meeting the normal challenges of each developmental stage.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 177.

<sup>14</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 178.

<sup>15</sup> D. W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality (1971; reprint, London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 178.

<sup>17</sup> This is also true for all other objects.

<sup>18</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 179.

<sup>19</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 209.



10. The psychic usefulness of the God representation resides in its permanent availability for any human emotion and that the psychic goal is protecting self-respect, preserving hope, and maintaining a sense of being related to primary objects.<sup>20</sup>

11. This process of creating and finding God never stops during the course of human life; this psychic and developmental process is active from birth to death.<sup>21</sup>

12. God is one of many mental representations that children and adults use during life; God is a cultural construct given to us to use, privately or publicly, in reworking our primary relationships.<sup>22</sup>

13. Our sense of self is affected by the representational traits of our private God, a God who can be used for religion.<sup>23</sup>

Rizzuto posits that the ability to form representations develops at an early age. The child is able to develop them further and/or transform them, but is not able to get rid of them.<sup>24</sup> Rizzuto insists that anyone who accepts that a person is able to have a mature relationship with a parent should have no difficulty believing that it is also possible to

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<sup>20</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 179.

<sup>21</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 179.

<sup>23</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 179-80.

<sup>24</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 43.

have a mature relationship with a God representation.<sup>25</sup> She mentions that God will remain as long as humans have the capacity to symbolize, fantasize, and create superhuman beings. She suggests that as long as parents answer children's queries and children can understand the relationship between cause and effect, then they will have a God representation, though precarious, constructed of parental representations.<sup>26</sup>

Rizzuto's views have been impacted by the insights of Margaret Mahler who insists that human beings are born absolutely dependent on the mother and remain somewhat dependent throughout life.<sup>27</sup> Rizzuto believes that it is during a process called mirroring, in which the child sees itself reflected in the eyes and face of the mother, that a child discovers itself and its need of the adult caregiver. The child can only hope that the adult will like it and care for it. This anxious state is a major contributor to the creation of a God representation.<sup>28</sup>

Rizzuto's theory does not allow for objects and representations to exist without each other.<sup>29</sup> The way that we represent others and ourselves is the very stuff of psychic

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<sup>25</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 186-88. This process is very similar to the one described by Freud in which children are said to have created gods in their pursuit of security in their struggle against the superior forces of nature.

<sup>29</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 83.

life.<sup>30</sup> Thus it appears that in the absence of objects (that which is not me), I would never be able to discover myself, grow cognitively, or maintain psychic health. If this is true, then object representations are both the work of a healthy mind and the healthy working of the mind—all in the interest of psychic security.

Object representations begin in “creative processes involving memory, and the entirety of psychic life.”<sup>31</sup> Her concept of what it means to be truly human requires that each person be able to use his or her imagination to deal with things beyond the limits of our senses; things like Miss Liberty, devils, the Devil, and God.<sup>32</sup> Using the imagination in this way is critical to the maintenance of psychic balance.<sup>33</sup> The process is ceaseless because objects are immortal in psychic reality and immortal because the human mind is incapable of destroying a representation.<sup>34</sup>

Keeping in mind Rizzuto’s view that it is impossible to pinpoint the time when these images or God representations are created, let us note two views of when developmentally healthy minds might create or find them. Freud asserts that even though the means of finding an object are complex, the process is partially completed sometime during childhood and before the onset of puberty with the mother being the first love

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<sup>30</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 44.

<sup>32</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 79.

object.<sup>35</sup> Rizzuto says that even though no one knows when a child's capacity to represent begins, this psychic business of creating and finding God is a life-long process.<sup>36</sup> She modifies Freud's timing when she suggests that current knowledge of affective and cognitive development leads to the conclusion that forming representations is a pre-oedipal phenomenon.<sup>37</sup>

What is the relationship between objects and God? Rizzuto incorporates Freud's belief that once objects are formed, they can be developed and transformed but cannot be discarded.<sup>38</sup> She reports that it was Freud who discovered that we create our own gods from the common stuff of everyday life, and that some people create knowingly and others unknowingly.<sup>39</sup> Rizzuto proposes that the constant "dialectic interaction" between a child's representation of itself and its primary object representations leads the pre-oedipal child to start forming a representation of a being who is "like" the parents, yet who is bigger, mightier, and "above all."<sup>40</sup> This process of forming a God representation is facilitated as the child closely observes its parents' worship patterns and rituals, listens to parental conversations about God, and attends religious services with its parents. Thus

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<sup>35</sup> Freud, Introductory Lectures, 408, 416.

<sup>36</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 183, 179.

<sup>37</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 50.

the presence and actions of parents provide a strong sense of reality for the invisible God.<sup>41</sup>

Each culture has its own god/s to whom its children will be introduced in some socially predetermined manner.<sup>42</sup> As the parents and society set about this task of presenting God and religious ideas to children, it should be noted that: (1) each child brings his/her own God (the one they have created in their own mind) to this official encounter; and (2) “no child arrives at the ‘house of God’ without his pet God under his arm.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, religion’s God and the God of the child meet each other and the child is faced with the lifelong task of integrating the two and then customizing (personalizing and continuously updating) its God representation. Subsequently, if the significant object(s) in a child’s life cause(s) it pain, the child uses its God to comfort itself and provide hope.<sup>44</sup> Children who use God representations in this manner tend to identify so closely with their personal God representations that, if they stopped believing in God, they would cease to be themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, all individuals, using material gleaned from the belief systems around them, from their own emerging representations of self, and from their own object relations,

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<sup>41</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 88-89.

<sup>45</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 51.

create a very individualized representation of God which can be repressed, transformed or used, but cannot be destroyed.<sup>46</sup>

Rizzuto's discoveries convince her: that persons' God representations make a specific contribution to their psychic balance; that God has object-related importance; and that the sources of belief or non-belief emerge early in a child's life. Thus, she hopes that her work will lead to a greater appreciation for the importance of belief.<sup>47</sup> These discoveries and conclusions put Rizzuto at odds with the cultural stance of contemporary psychoanalysis, which tends to endorse Freud's view of religion as "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."<sup>48</sup> Thus, while Rizzuto's theory is anchored within psychoanalysis, it reaches out beyond that particular discipline by offering an explanation of religious belief as normative, healthy, and understandable.

#### Parents as a Source of God Representations

When Rizzuto says that God is a special type of object representation created by children from mental material gleaned from representations of primary objects, she is extending Freud's contention that children create gods out of psychic material gleaned from their fathers in their effort to deal with external insecurities.<sup>49</sup> In Rizzuto's scheme, the primary objects could include mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, and other caregivers who contribute to the early personal experiences of a child. Perhaps a close

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<sup>46</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 90.

<sup>47</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>48</sup> Freud, Future, 55; and Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>49</sup> Freud, Future, 19-20; and New Introductory Lectures, 207.

examination of Rizzuto and White in dialogue will yield some clues as to how they see the process working.

While examining Rizzuto's argument about the reality of God representations and about how people relate to that God residing in their minds, it is important to remember that she is not arguing about the actual existence of God.<sup>50</sup> Because of the insights she contributed to understanding the importance of early childhood experiences, her concept of how object relations function in children's formation of God representations has rich potential for use by theorists other than psychoanalysts, psychologists, and child developmentalists. However, she intentionally confines herself to dealing with "psychic experiences."<sup>51</sup> She insists that logic does not allow her "to go beyond a psychological level of inference," thus she refuses to "make pronouncements appropriate for philosophers and theologians."<sup>52</sup> Even so, her theory has the potential for a much wider level of inference and application.

While Rizzuto refuses to argue about the reality of God outside of the human psyche, she considers religion to be a dynamic force in human life and laments the fact that psychoanalysis has forgotten that the patient's personal experience with God has clinical importance.<sup>53</sup> In league with Freud, she too believes that humans create their

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<sup>50</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 4.

own gods from the “warp and woof” of their everyday life,<sup>54</sup> that this psychic creation is based on life experiences. She reports that there is good literature to support the contention that there are similarities between parental images and images of deities and the psychoanalytic notion that family relationships impact religious feelings and ideas.<sup>55</sup>

Rizzuto delineates five advantages of applying the psychoanalytic approach to the study of an individual’s personal religious experience. Those advantages are: (1) it allows the analyst to use the vocabulary of the patient in understanding the background of his/her belief, (2) it relates to the patient as an actual historical being, (3) it interacts with the patient’s experience while it is happening, (4) it is conducive to the use of hermeneutics applied to the patient’s life history and relations with objects and God, and (5) it makes it possible for us to understand the private God of each person.<sup>56</sup> The richness of the literature, the indications of her own research, and her clinical technique all require Rizzuto to accept, or suggest that she accept, the patient’s experience and the recounting of it as truth.

Rizzuto advises us that a child’s interactive experience with objects begins with parents and reaches a major milestone when the child creates the divinity. During that time, more than representation is at play. Sophisticated mental, developmental, relational, and environmental changes, which not only affect overall development, but also the

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<sup>54</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 4-5.



psychic shifts taking place in the child around the age of five years, are also involved.<sup>57</sup>

When the child creates the God representation, it is relying on memory, its own ability to fantasize, and images left behind by the initial experience.<sup>58</sup> “It is out of this matrix of facts and fantasies, wishes, hopes, and fears, in the exchanges with those incredible beings called parents, that the image of God is concocted.”<sup>59</sup> This is a very private process, this business of a child’s creating its own God, and this process takes place silently as the child interacts with its caregivers.<sup>60</sup>

The reader, no doubt, noticed the role of fantasy in the creation of the God representation, and rightly so. Rizzuto is straightforward on this point. That a child could use experience and fantasy to create a representation of God is, for her, a sign of ingenuity.<sup>61</sup> The temptation to give negative connotations to the involvement of fantasy ought to be resisted because fantasy is a child’s method of testing and interpreting its

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<sup>57</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 6-7.

<sup>59</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>61</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 208.

experiences.<sup>62</sup> Fantasy being involved or not, the point is that the God created in the mind of the child has many traits of the parents.<sup>63</sup>

At this point, special attention should be paid to the source of the raw material with which the child creates the God representation: the parents--what they are, what they say, what they do, and how they relate to the child. The child uses this raw material to create, and later to reshape, its God in keeping with its own private needs.<sup>64</sup> At some later point in life, other significant persons may contribute to the psychic memory bank and subsequent re-elaborations of the God representation.<sup>65</sup>

The child's personal experience with its parents will influence the type of God created, and once created, that God will then affect the tone of the child's relation with the parents, its perception of self, and its ongoing spiritual life.<sup>66</sup>

#### The Role of Personal Experience in Rizzuto's Theory

The child's interaction with objects is what this dissertation labels personal experience. It appears that these early personal experiences help the child establish a

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<sup>62</sup> Melanie Klein spells fantasy with a "ph" to indicate that this is an unconscious process which emanates from within a child's psyche and imagines what is without. This is the child's method of testing and interpreting its experiences. Thus, "phantasy" refers to the activity and the product of fantasizing. Juliet Mitchell, introduction to The Selected Melanie Klein, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Free Press, 1986), 22-23.

<sup>63</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 208-09. Though parental traits dominate in the God representation created, these parental traits are not the only contributors to the end product.

<sup>64</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>65</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>66</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 208.

personal hermeneutic by which all subsequent experiences will be interpreted. What is the role of personal experience in Rizzuto's theory?

Psychoanalysis maintains that human beings are involved in a never ending effort to maintain psychic equilibrium; Rizzuto reminds us that the whole process of representation serves the purpose of making people psychologically viable in the real world.<sup>67</sup> She adds that multiple memories, especially memories of experiences with significant objects, are used to help in the quest for mental equipoise.<sup>68</sup> Mental balance requires that we have a viable sense of self and self-representation. That sense of self and the representation of the self is dependent on how successful we are in making personal memories of our objects compatible with our concept of self.<sup>69</sup> Thus, memory is like a busy supply depot out of which we take materials for constructing our representation of ourselves and others. The material in the memory is gathered from personal experiences shared with significant objects.<sup>70</sup>

These memories are stored and coded in such a way that "the object is retrieved as a representation."<sup>71</sup> Rizzuto maintains that retrieval of relevant and useable material is more important than the storage process, that representations are the product of this

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<sup>67</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 55.

<sup>68</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 55.

<sup>70</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 76-77.

<sup>71</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 55-56.

system of coding and processing.<sup>72</sup> The path to selfhood is paved when memories of our interaction with objects are called up to help us relate to, or adapt to, some present situation.<sup>73</sup> Moving constantly between present self and object representations to past self and object representations is one of the means by which we produce a history of ourselves, and become a self.<sup>74</sup>

Rizzuto is unequivocal in advancing the notion that the importance of a child's early experiences with objects is beyond question. She maintains that the object side of the experience is what children remember about them. She reports that the body language of the object is closely observed by children and remembered; that children remember whether they were soft or hard, the sound of the voice, the very words spoken, the expressions on the face and the look in the eyes.<sup>75</sup> Is there any wonder that early personal experiences have life-long consequences?

Rizzuto notes that representations are not free-standing entities. She asserts that no analyst ever witnesses an object representation. What the analyst encounters is the patient's concept of the object (relative or friend),<sup>76</sup> a concept that is memory based, a memory that is based on personal experience with the object.

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<sup>72</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 56.

<sup>73</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 57.

<sup>74</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 57.

<sup>75</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 57.

<sup>76</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 76.

A way to assess the role of personal experience in Rizzuto's theory is to put her in dialogue with the psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson. Though Erikson's professional roots go deeply into psychoanalytic soil, his psychosocial theory of child development indicates his belief that social and interpersonal factors are at play in a child's development. Hence, his theory provides added evidence that the drive/structure model does not adequately explain human development. Erikson addresses the issue of personal experience when he says that a "sense of basic trust is the first component of mental health to develop in life."<sup>77</sup> In fact, basic trust is the "cornerstone of a healthy personality."<sup>78</sup>

Any type of growth presupposes the satisfaction of certain innate needs. Human biological, psychic, social, and spiritual growth are no exceptions. Erikson acknowledges that humans are born with the need to be regularly and mutually affirmed and certified.<sup>79</sup> He suggests that the absence of this positive interaction and mutual affirmation between a child and its mother can radically harm the infant. Erikson's tone is reminiscent of an evangelist when he urges mothers never again to allow themselves to be duped by theorists into disbelieving that they are participating in a miracle; for mothers

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<sup>77</sup> Erik H. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 54.

<sup>78</sup> Erikson, Identity, 58.

<sup>79</sup> Erik H. Erikson, "The Ontogeny of Ritualization in Man (1966)" in A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980, ed. Stephen Schlein (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 577.

to respond so effectively to the demands and needs of their babies that the babies learn to trust their mothers and to trust themselves and the world is certainly miraculous.<sup>80</sup>

Erikson believes that a child's normal psychic growth required the presence of close, positive interaction with its mother because it is through the infant's relationship with the mother that trust is born. The amount of trust that a child develops is directly related to the "quality of the maternal relationship."<sup>81</sup> He insists that modern psychiatry has reaffirmed that one of the mainsprings of emotional vitality is the "continuity of maternal care."<sup>82</sup> Mothers generate this sense of well-being and trust in their children (1) by caring sensitively for the baby's personal needs, and (2) by having a strong conviction that they, as mothers, are trustworthy individuals who are operating well within the framework of their particular community's style of life.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson "The Power of the Newborn (1953)" in A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980, ed. Stephen Schlein (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 571. When this happens, it is indeed a miracle and such miracles do not occur in the lives of all children and parents.

<sup>81</sup> Erikson, Identity, 65. Even though Erikson most often mentions the mother and seems to assign the principle role to her, there are indications that he also considered the role of fathers pivotal. Erikson, Identity, 65-66.

<sup>82</sup> Erikson, "Power of Newborn," 570-71.

<sup>83</sup> Erikson, Identity, 65.

For Erikson, trust rises out of being cared for.<sup>84</sup> He calls this good care the “touchstone” of any given religion and the “cradle of faith.”<sup>85</sup> Faith is an appropriate substitute label for trust since Erikson considers religion to be one institution from culture and tradition that has close ties to the issue of trust.<sup>86</sup> Trust gives birth to hope and “hope, then, is the first psychosocial strength.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, the early personal experiences of an infant impact its mental health, its development of personality and personal identity, its interpersonal relationships, and its relationships to society and to spiritual matters. Hence Erikson verifies Rizzuto’s conclusion that early personal experiences are critical in the development of a child, including the child’s religious experience.

The positive interaction and mutual affirmation taking place between the child and its mother (or the mother figure) is the substance of personal experience. If the relationship is warm and mutually reaffirming and basic trust is established, the child will have a hermeneutic based on trust and will manifest an openness to others. If basic trust is not established, the child’s hermeneutic will sit squarely on doubt, closure, and entrenchment. In either scenario, the social implications are extensive.

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<sup>84</sup> Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society, 35th anniversary ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 250.

<sup>85</sup> Erikson, Childhood, 250; and Erikson, “Power of Newborn,” 571.

<sup>86</sup> Erikson, Childhood, 278; and Identity, 66.

<sup>87</sup> Erikson, “The Human Life Cycle (1968)” in A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980, ed. Stephen Schlein (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 601-02.

A point made by Erikson, and affirmed by Rizzuto, closes this effort to demonstrate and verify her conclusion regarding the importance of the infant years and relations with parents (or caregivers). Erikson concludes that children, including infants and perhaps even fetuses, reflect the quality of the environment in which they are raised. He alleges that children sense the varying emotions of their parents, even if those emotions are not overtly manifested in their presence. Therefore, he declares, “you cannot fool children.”<sup>88</sup>

Why is it impossible to fool children? Has personal experience provided them with a hermeneutic which allows them to accurately interpret interpersonal encounters? Is it correct to assume that the child’s interpretation of relational experiences is more important than the actual experience? Is the God representation created by a child a very personal and private interpretation of its parents? Perhaps Ellen White and Rizzuto can help us decide.

#### Comparative Analysis and Critique Regarding God Concepts

Obviously, perfect agreement between a church prophet and a psychoanalyst is not expected. However, there are some striking points of convergence in White’s and Rizzuto’s theories. Our objective in this section is to look for points of convergence and divergence in White’s emphasis on parents as God’s representatives and Rizzuto’s emphasis on parents as sources of God representations, and to highlight personal

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<sup>88</sup> Erikson, Identity, 105-06; and Rizzuto, Birth, 204.



experience as determinative for both, thus using Rizzuto's insights to critique and expand White's concepts.

### Points of Divergence

While much of what Rizzuto says is complimentary to or compatible with positions White has taken, there are differences. They differ on the issue of God's existence. White takes a stand on the actual existence of God, Rizzuto does not. White states simply, yet emphatically: "God always has been."<sup>89</sup> Rizzuto, psychologically speaking, says that while God is not a hallucination,<sup>90</sup> God "is an illusory object" created by the child out of representational materials retrieved from the representations of primary objects.<sup>91</sup> The reference to illusion should be clarified so that the reader might not misunderstand the process that Rizzuto is describing.

Rizzuto, quoting Winnicott, gives insights into the nature of illusion as used in this context. She maintains that both transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the foundation of experience. The mother's capacity to adapt her care to the infant's needs gives the infant the illusion that what it creates is real. It is this intermediate area of experience which forms the larger part of

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<sup>89</sup> Ellen G. White, Medical Ministry: A Treatise on Medical Missionary Work in the Gospel, compiled by Board of Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estates, 2nd ed. (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1963), 92.

<sup>90</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 178.

<sup>91</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 177-78.

the infant's experience and which is retained throughout life.<sup>92</sup> The inference here is that the quality of the mother's interaction with the infant creates within the child the sense that the child is the cause of things' being as they are. Winnicott maintains that, at the beginning of the infant's life, the mother by an almost perfect adaptation of her care to the baby's needs, gives the infant the illusion of oneness with the mother's breast. The child's illusion of control over the breast allows it to develop a sense of omnipotence.<sup>93</sup> This feeling of omnipotence is based on the infant's experience; whenever the mother adjusts her actions to suit her perception of the infant's needs, the infant is given the *illusion* "that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create."<sup>94</sup> This overlap between what the baby wants and what the mother supplies gives the infant the illusion of omnipotence.<sup>95</sup>

Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell comment on Winnicott's idea of *illusion*. They note that it is the mother who delivers that world to the child. This happens when the infant is about to conjure an object that matches its need. At that precise moment, the mother gives the infant that suitable object. This point in time is called the "moment of illusion" because the infant imagines that it created the object. In this illusionary moment, the "infant's hallucination and the object presented by the mother are taken to be

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<sup>92</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 177.

<sup>93</sup> Winnicott, 11.

<sup>94</sup> Winnicott, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Winnicott, 12.

identical,” and the infant experiences itself as omnipotent. This situation helps the child to become attuned to its own bodily functions and impulses, and this becomes the basis for the gradually evolving sense of self.<sup>96</sup> They report that Winnicott believed this feeling of omnipotence to be the foundation for healthy development and a solid sense of self.<sup>97</sup>

The mother’s sensitive anticipation of the infant’s needs, and her good sense of timing in satisfying them, is crucial in the process of illusion. Winnicott maintains that illusion is made possible by a person’s taking the time to bring the world to the infant in a form that it can understand.<sup>98</sup> Thus the mother’s sensitivity to the needs of the child provides “the repetitive experiential basis” for the child’s sense of omnipotence.<sup>99</sup>

At some point in the future, after the illusion of omnipotence has been firmly established, the mother’s task is to gradually disabuse the infant of this very illusion.<sup>100</sup> Healthy development requires that the child learn that there is a world of reality outside its control and that there are limits to its powers.<sup>101</sup> Thus the mother has given, and now she takes away; she gave of herself in giving her breast, and in providing her breast in a

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<sup>96</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 193.

<sup>97</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 192.

<sup>98</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 192.

<sup>99</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 192.

<sup>100</sup> Winnicott, 11, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Greenberg and Mitchell, 193.

timely fashion, she gave her baby the illusion of omnipotence.<sup>102</sup> Now as she takes away her breast at the time of weaning, she weans the child of its notion of omnipotence.<sup>103</sup> Thus in Rizzuto's psychoanalytically-informed view, infants need to feel omnipotent for a time, and in the natural course of development, she observes that they actually do. In White's view, all humans have always been finite and God only is omnipotent.<sup>104</sup>

White's insistence on God's omnipotence is resisted by Rizzuto. Rizzuto alleges that real dangers are present in any religious belief that postulates a God who is omniscient and omnipotent.<sup>105</sup> For Rizzuto, psychic freedom is at stake. Psychic freedom demands that people examine all beliefs with the same candor. For a believer to accept God as omnipotent would excuse God and religion from critical scrutiny.<sup>106</sup> Such an exception could lead to the individual being duped by religion and its God/s.

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<sup>102</sup> This calls to mind the Biblical account of Job and his response to the news that calamity had overtaken him: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21, NASB).

<sup>103</sup> Winnicott, 13; and Greenberg and Mitchell, 193.

<sup>104</sup> Ellen G. White, The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets as Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old (1890; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 116.

<sup>105</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, afterword to Object Relations Theory and Religion, eds. Mark Finn and John Gartner (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 158.

<sup>106</sup> Rizzuto, afterword, 158.

Let us leave the issue of illusion and return to Rizzuto's position on God's existence. She does not argue for belief in the existence of God.<sup>107</sup> She notes that, as a psychologist of religion, she has nothing to say about the transcendent reality (God).<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, White argues forcefully in favor of the existence of God. For White, the existence of God is a matter beyond question; perhaps beyond discussion. God's existence is not a theory; it is a demonstrable reality.<sup>109</sup> She claims that without the guidance of the Bible in their research, the greatest human minds get confused in their attempts to understand the relationship between science and revelation, which eventuates in their denying the existence of God.<sup>110</sup>

If anyone wishes to argue about the concrete fact of belief in God,<sup>111</sup> Rizzuto urges that certain things be kept in mind: (1) that there are essential differences between the concept of God and the images of God; (2) that the differences are both conceptual and emotional; (3) that the concept of God is the subject of theological debate and that this God leaves us cold; and (4) that, before a person can accept God, previous

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<sup>107</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 36.

<sup>108</sup> Rizzuto, afterword, 174.

<sup>109</sup> White, "The Essential Knowledge," (Testimony 36, 1904), Testimonies, 8:258, 325.

<sup>110</sup> White, Story of Patriarchs, 113.

<sup>111</sup> Rizzuto believed that the question regarding the existence of God was related to growing old. The God representation is reshaped throughout an individual's life and the final representation is formed as they are contemplating their own impending death. With aging, this issue becomes a personal matter to be faced or avoided. Rizzuto, Birth, 8.

interpersonal experiences must flesh out the God concept in a representation that the individual can accept emotionally.<sup>112</sup>

Rizzuto explains that the images of God, combining in multiple forms, produce the God representation which dominates the mental landscape in a given individual at a given time.<sup>113</sup> This God is psychically real. The child is emotionally invested in this God. This is the “pet God” that the child brings into the encounter of the official God of his/her culture’s religion.<sup>114</sup> For an older person who is a believer, this very personal “pet God” is real, does exist, is alive, and interacts with the subject. For the religious person, this relation with God is real and emotionally charged.<sup>115</sup> God is not a symbol or sign to such a person; God is a living being who communicates in ways that the believer can interpret.<sup>116</sup> Rizzuto adds that this believer’s investment in her/his image of God is neither psychotic nor neurotic, and that this believer is most likely emotionally mature.<sup>117</sup>

Rizzuto believes that the concept of God is created on a different psychic level than the image of God. According to her, theologians, using metaphysical reasoning,

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<sup>112</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 47-48.

<sup>113</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 47.

<sup>114</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 8.

<sup>115</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 49.

<sup>116</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 49.

<sup>117</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 49.

debate the existence of God. The result is a cold, impersonal God.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps this is so because a conceptual God is the result of precise analysis of philosophical premises, and even if a person determines that such a God truly exists, the absence of emotional ties may render that God unacceptable.<sup>119</sup>

When dealing with an external reality called God, Rizzuto warns against making assumptions and sentimentalizing beliefs. She proclaims that “if there is a God, it does not need us and our disciplines to do well. He/She has lived well for centuries without us.”<sup>120</sup>

There is another point of divergence. White and Rizzuto are approaching their subject, experiences of children, using different methods. Rizzuto’s theory is research based. White’s theory is revelation based. Rizzuto cites empirical studies done by scholars other than herself, a rich literature, and her own clinical study.<sup>121</sup> Her insights are the fruit of tedious study, research, and observation. White’s position is based on revelation, not research. She confesses that she possessed “no special wisdom” in herself. She reports that, whatever instructions she has given either verbally or in writing, are nothing more than an expression of the light given to her by God.<sup>122</sup> White says that

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<sup>118</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 47-48.

<sup>119</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 48.

<sup>120</sup> Rizzuto, afterword, 174.

<sup>121</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 3, 5.

<sup>122</sup> White, “An Unwarranted Distinction” (Testimony 33, 1889), Testimonies, 5: 691.

an angel of God presented to her the matter of prenatal influences.<sup>123</sup> In 1906, she reported that she had written many books over the previous sixty years, but was dependent on the Holy Spirit all the while. She claimed that her books contained light from heaven and that they would bear the test of time.<sup>124</sup> She confided that she was as dependent on the Holy Spirit in writing out her views as in receiving them. She never claimed infallibility for her writings.<sup>125</sup> However, she insisted that all her articles and books were not merely her personal opinions, but a presentation of what God had presented to her.<sup>126</sup> She said that the words she used in describing what she had seen were her own unless they had been spoken to her by an angel, in which case she enclosed them in quotation marks.<sup>127</sup> Thus, from a research base, Rizzuto writes about how the psychic processes of children are impacted by experiencing life with those caring for them; White, citing revelation, writes about how children's experiences affect their attitudes.

Empirical research, such as Rizzuto cites, ought to be taken seriously and is not easily denied or overturned. It ought to be allowed to inform our thinking and judgment. A word from God ought, also, to be taken seriously. Yet, as the conclusions of empirical

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<sup>123</sup> White, Mind, Character, 1:131.

<sup>124</sup> White, "No Boastful Claims," Selected Messages, 1:35.

<sup>125</sup> White, "No Claim to Infallibility," Selected Messages, 1:37.

<sup>126</sup> White, "The Integrity of the Testimonies," Selected Messages, 1:29.

<sup>127</sup> White, "Receiving and Imparting the Light," Selected Messages, 1:37.



research must be tested and verified, so too ought assertions through inspired sources be tested and verified.

### Points of Convergence

The language used by White and Rizzuto in describing the role of parents in the spiritual development of children is strikingly similar. White speaks of parents as representatives of God,<sup>128</sup> while Rizzuto speaks of parents as a source of children's God representations.<sup>129</sup> In either case, the child's concept of God is based upon that child's personal experiences with and perceptions of the parents.

White, when describing the role of parents as representatives of God, laments that so few Seventh-day Adventist parents are aware of the importance of their influence on their children. She states that a godly example is more powerful than religious instruction. White maintains that God desires parents to be the embodiment of Christian principles, a living copy that their children can imitate. She adds that children can be led, but not driven to God, and that parents, by living godly, consistent lives, can show them the way.<sup>130</sup> She asserts that God's words are interpreted to children by the character revealed in their parents' daily lives. Parental kindness, justice, and patience are interpreted by children as evidence of what God is like, and awaken, in the child's heart, love, gratitude, and trust.<sup>131</sup> Parental harshness will yield the opposite result.

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<sup>128</sup> White, Education, 287.

<sup>129</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 52.

<sup>130</sup> White, "Godly Example in the Home," 3; and, Adventist Home, 307.

<sup>131</sup> White, Education, 244-45.

Rizzuto, when speaking of parents as sources of God representations, like White, emphasizes the importance of parental examples. Rizzuto reports that the creation of a child's God is a "private process" taking place during "silent exchanges" between parent and child.<sup>132</sup> By using the term "silent exchanges," she insinuates that who the parents are, what they do, and how they relate to the child all impact the child's God representation. As the child comes in contact with other objects, their examples are used to reshape the God representation.<sup>133</sup>

We next turn our attention to the role of parents in personal experience, another point of convergence. Both White and Rizzuto consider personal experience to be at the core of human well-being. The experiences that are the most telling in each scheme are those shared with parents. Rizzuto reports that none of her patients formed their God representations from only one parental image. They used the real life parents and the parents of their hopes or dreams as sources; however, one of the imagos always dominated.<sup>134</sup> White notes that both father and mother have major roles to play as God's representatives, but she assigns the leading part to the mother.<sup>135</sup>

Rizzuto claims that the matrix in which we are born and raised is that of caring people.<sup>136</sup> Within this mix of caring persons, Rizzuto mentions the "mother" object as the

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<sup>132</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>133</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 210.

<sup>134</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 44.

<sup>135</sup> White, Adventist Home, 240.

<sup>136</sup> Rizzuto, afterword, 166.

first and most important contributor to the child's organization of its experiences.<sup>137</sup>

Rizzuto explains how the infant's interactions with the maternal object and all the other objects are organized in very intricate object representations that are able to transform and update in sync with the on-going transformation of the self-representation.<sup>138</sup>

White indicates that the mother is to rule as queen of the home with the children being her subjects. The mother's wise rule is to give her paramount influence in the home;<sup>139</sup> her influence, sweetened by smiles and encouragement, is to be unceasing.<sup>140</sup>

The insights of Rizzuto cited here serve to explain what is happening in the psyches of the children of whose experience White speaks. Rizzuto makes it apparent that the experiences infants share with their mothers are especially significant in their overall development, and I add, important to their spiritual development. If we were to refer back to Erikson's explanation of how basic trust has its origin in these early infant/mother experiences where the infant learns to trust its mother, we would see again that faith is born within this context, that religion finds its foundation here.<sup>141</sup> Rizzuto's insights help us better to understand why White would counsel mothers to wake up to the fact that their influence and examples are affecting both the characters and destinies of

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<sup>137</sup> Rizzuto, afterword, 166.

<sup>138</sup> Rizzuto, afterword, 166.

<sup>139</sup> White, Adventist Home, 232.

<sup>140</sup> White, Adventist Home, 240.

<sup>141</sup> Erikson, Childhood, 250; and Erikson and Erikson, 571.

their children, and why White, for the sake of the children, pleads with mothers to develop well-balanced minds and pure characters which reflect only that which is good, true, and beautiful.<sup>142</sup>

In conclusion, both White and Rizzuto demonstrate that parents play a significant role in the formative personal experiences of their children and their children's concept of God. In both schemes, these early experiences seem determinative. But just how determined are children? This question brings to mind Victor Frankl's rejection of human "nothingbutness."<sup>143</sup> Are infants so deeply impacted by genetics or environment that they are really "nothingbut" biological and social constructs? Perhaps Alice Miller can help us answer this question.

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<sup>142</sup> White, Adventist Home, 243.

<sup>143</sup> This concept refers to the idea that "man is nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment." Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning, 153.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Impact of Negative Parenting

The pursuit of an honest, defensible, and positive view of the Testimonies of Ellen White has led us through a discussion of parental contributions to children's God representations. Ellen White did not limit her discussion to children's spiritual formation, but also presented warnings about the effects of abusive and/or neglectful parenting. The realities of our world indicate that excellence in parenting and child care are ideal goals, but they are not universally practiced. Hence, substantial numbers of children are likely to go on having negative experiences with parents. These abusive childhood relational experiences may later impact society at large.

Long ago, Ellen White raised a prophetic voice against the abusive treatment of children. In our time, Alice Miller does the same. In this chapter, I will review what White and Miller have said about the impact of poor parenting on children and on society at large. I will argue that Alice Miller's careful documentation of the far-reaching implications of poor parenting reveals the primacy of personal experience in a child's life and conclude by bringing her case studies and Ellen White's contentions regarding the negative impact on society of "an ill-regulated family" into critical dialogue.<sup>1</sup> Thus, works of Alice Miller will be called upon to clarify, critique, expand, and/or reform White's view of negative parenting.

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<sup>1</sup> White, Story of Patriarchs, 579.

### White's Views on Negative Parenting

White asserts that there are hundreds of children living at cross-purposes to God's will in consequence of poor parenting. She warns parents that they are living, speaking, and acting in the presence of God, that they stand in the place of God to their children, and that God will not vindicate parental misrule.<sup>2</sup> She declares that harsh, cold, unloving treatment of children defaces the image of God in them.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, she states that this type of parenting develops evil in the child, hardens the heart, causes willful resistance, and drives the child to rebellion.<sup>4</sup>

White writes that she observed a mother forcefully take a plaything from the grasp of a small child. The child did not understand the reason for this and became upset. An argument ensued and the mother, using her parental authority, sharply chastised the child. To all outward appearances, the issue had been settled, but White, sensing the damage done to the child, rebuked the mother for her harsh, unwise behavior. She states that using superior age and maturity against a defenseless child, as this case illustrates, plants the seeds of rebellion in a child's heart.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Importance of Home Training," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 6 June 1899, 353; and "Family Government is to be Maintained," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 13 March 1894, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, "Words to Parents," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 29 Jan. 1901, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, "An Appeal to Parents," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 8 July 1902, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, "Home Training," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 5 Dec. 1899, 781.

White frequently speaks to the subject of children's wills. She informs parents that it is a mistake to try to break the will of a child.<sup>6</sup> A child's will is not to be forced into subjection, crushed, or ignored. Instead, she recommends that it be guided and molded by parents who have already submitted their own lives to the will of God. Parents are to practice self-control and demonstrate in their lives the principles of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

White recommends that parents govern their homes by a rule of love. She states that those parents who govern by love have far more influence on their children than those parents who govern their homes by harshness and force. White maintains that parents should avoid fretting, scolding, and unnecessary requirements because children lose confidence in parents who oppress and/or depress them by making unreasonable demands. White passionately pleads that the rules of the home not be administered with a rod of iron.<sup>8</sup> She writes

Parents who exercise a spirit of dominion [domination] and authority, transmitted to them from their own parents, which leads them to be exacting in their discipline and instruction, will not train their children aright. By their severity in dealing with their errors, they stir up the worst passions of the human heart, and leave their children with a sense of injustice and wrong. They meet in their children the very disposition that they themselves have imparted to them. Such parents drive their children away from God, by talking to them on religious subjects; for the Christian religion is made unattractive and even repulsive by this misrepresentation of truth. Children will say, "Well, if that is religion, I do not want anything of it." It is thus that enmity is often created in the heart against religion; and because of an arbitrary enforcement of authority, children are led to

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, "Appeal," 8.

<sup>7</sup> White, Education, 289-92.

<sup>8</sup> White, "Words to Parents," 65; and "Appeal," 8.

despise the law and the government of heaven. Parents have fixed the eternal destiny of their children by their own misrule.<sup>9</sup>

White informs parents that this domineering style of parenting will impact, not only their immediate family, but also their children's children for generations to come and society at large.<sup>10</sup>

White allows for corporal punishment only as a last resort, but she gives strict guidelines as to how it is to be administered. Parents are not to spank children in anger because children will imitate this improper way of responding when they are angry.<sup>11</sup> Before striking a child, parents should consider how they would feel if treated thus harshly and remember that they are but grown-up children.<sup>12</sup> They should pause to pray and ask for God's guidance in correcting the child.<sup>13</sup> If parents determine that a spanking is necessary, they ought first to assure the child of their love, then express sorrow at having to inflict pain, and finally pray with the child before administering the punishment.<sup>14</sup> However, White cautions those parents who choose to spank their children. She warns that many cases are made worse by this disciplinary approach.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> White, Child Guidance, 286; see also "Family Government," 161-62.

<sup>10</sup> White, "Family Government," 162.

<sup>11</sup> White, "Home Training," 781.

<sup>12</sup> White, Child Guidance, 280.

<sup>13</sup> White, Child Guidance, 252.

<sup>14</sup> White, "Home Training," 782.

<sup>15</sup> White, Child Guidance, 251-52.



White advises parents that the ultimate objective of childrearing is to lead children to Christ. She reminds them that many children who have been a blessing to the world owe their success to the influence of godly parents. In contrast, many children who have failed in life and/or turned to crime, owe their failure to poor parenting.<sup>16</sup> Herein lies the purpose for introducing Alice Miller. Miller has carefully documented with case studies the far-reaching implications of poor parenting.

### An Introduction to Miller's Views

Alice Miller, resident of Zurich, Switzerland, practiced psychoanalysis for over twenty years. In 1988 she broke away from both the Swiss and International Psychoanalytical Associations because of a radical change in her attitude toward psychoanalysis.<sup>17</sup> Miller intimates that she is a survivor of an abusive childhood, a childhood that she turned her back on and tried to forget, but she eventually was able to face the old wounds of the past and find freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Miller explains that since the end of World War II she has been driven by the question of what could have caused one person to think of and execute a plan that involved the gassing of millions of people. This question became more than an academic exercise for her as she came to realize, for some unexplained reason, that it is easier today

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<sup>16</sup> White, Story of Patriarchs, 244.

<sup>17</sup> Alice Miller, For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence, trans. Hildegarde Hannum and Hunter Hannum (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), vii.

<sup>18</sup> Alice Miller, The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self, trans. Ruth Ward, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, Basic Books, 1994), 24-25.

than ever before for such hatred to victimize us.<sup>19</sup> The question became personal after her own second analysis. At that time her analyst helped her to understand that *being* was more important than *behavior*. Miller reports that this experience opened the way for her to learn things her own way and helped her to be “sensitive to the pedagogical atmosphere surrounding us all.” Many conversations with her son Martin brought to Miller’s awareness her own unconscious compulsions which had been internalized during her childhood. She credits Martin’s rehearsal of his experiences as the beginning of her liberation from these compulsions.<sup>20</sup> Thus, much of what Alice Miller writes is informed by her own experience of life.

Miller maintains that “all children are born to grow, to develop, to live, to love, and to articulate their needs and feeling for self-protection.”<sup>21</sup> She adds that the successful development of a child requires the love, respect, and protection of their adult caregivers whose task it is to help the child to become oriented to the world.<sup>22</sup> In contrast Miller states emphatically:

When these vital needs are frustrated and children are, instead, abused for the sake of adults’ needs by being exploited, beaten, punished, taken advantage of, manipulated, neglected, or deceived without the intervention of any witness, then their integrity will be lastingly impaired.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, x-xi.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, xviii-xix.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, Appendix, Drama, 141.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, Appendix, Drama, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Miller, Appendix, Drama, 141.

Adults abuse children when they exploit the child's limitless dependency, trust, and longing to love and be loved. Miller considers this exploitation to be a criminal act. She laments adult ignorance, indifference, and refusal to give up such behavior. Miller, while conceding that much of this adult behavior is unconsciously committed, asserts that the consequences of this negative parenting are nonetheless calamitous.<sup>24</sup>

Corporal punishment is a key component in Miller's concept of negative parenting and the impact of negative parenting is the focal point of this chapter. Even though Miller's anti-spanking position is unequivocal and convincing, and in spite of the fact that she reports that the general public is beginning to understand how childrearing practices transmit sufferings from parents to children, she is obliged to admit that many of the Americans with whom she spoke are unpersuaded by her arguments. These Americans reject the notion that the corporal punishment of children contributes in any way to violence in society at large. They blame it on "too much" freedom.<sup>25</sup>

Thus it becomes obvious that Miller's argument has not gone unchallenged and it is likely to face continued challenges. Therefore, as a means of assessing the strength of Miller's position on abusive parenting and attempts to justify it, which she refers to as "poisonous pedagogy,"<sup>26</sup> and by way of establishing a context in which to present the material on negative child-rearing practices, I will use insights from psychoanalyst

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<sup>24</sup> Alice Miller, Breaking Down the Wall of Silence, trans. Simon Worrall (New York: Dutton, Penguin Books, 1991), 141-42.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, xii-xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 58-59.

Leonard Shengold. I resort to Shengold because his definition of abuse, which will appear later and which is at odds with Miller's definition of abuse, seems to provide the ideological explanation that many Americans would use to justify their continued support for the corporal punishment of children.

Shengold opines that "too much and too little are qualities of experience."<sup>27</sup> His point is that in interpersonal relationships, it is possible for a child to receive inadequate quantities of certain things like love, affection, and care and excessive amounts of other things like censure, rebuke, neglect, and/or abuse. He defines trauma as being too much of too much or too much of not enough which he maintains prevents proper development; that is, when a child has felt too much to bear, we call it abuse, and when a child has received too little to meet its needs, we say it has been deprived. What happens to the child's mind and body evokes responses from within the child. These external influences impact the total being of the child, especially the psyche, but in concert with biological strengths and weaknesses.<sup>28</sup>

Shengold informs us that the child's survival is related to its physical need for care and its psychological need to be wanted. There is for each person a level of need and care that is just enough to give cause for trying to please caregivers. The intentional effort to destroy or weaken the separate identity of another person is what Shengold labels "soul murder." The methods by which this dreadful process is actualized are

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<sup>27</sup> Leonard Shengold, Soul Murder: The Effect of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Shengold, 1.

numerous: abusing someone sexually, depriving someone of emotional support, and physical and mental torture. The soul of the victim is in captivity to some other person or perhaps, dead. The victim can no longer feel joy or love as an independent person.<sup>29</sup>

Shengold mentions that not all cases of abuse eventuate in soul murder. He reports that the usual victims are children. Why? Tyranny over children is made possible by their almost total physical and emotional dependency on adults. Generally, there is no way for the child to escape; thus the child must submit to abuse and, in most cases, begins to identify with the abuser.<sup>30</sup> Most abusers are sick parents who relate to their children as extensions of themselves or as mere objects they can use to satisfy personal cravings.<sup>31</sup>

Shengold cautions against efforts to connect pathological behavior with specific causes.<sup>32</sup> He resists the tendency to oversimplify things; thus he urges that we avoid explaining human behavior as a response to external events or, on the other hand, as a result of intrapsychic forces.<sup>33</sup>

Shengold's insights are helpful in laying before us the terrain that we shall be traversing in this chapter. His advice is reasonable. Alice Miller would probably find all of the above acceptable. Yet, she would probably want the reader to pay attention to

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<sup>29</sup> Shengold, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Shengold, 2, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Shengold, 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Shengold, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Shengold, 3.

Shengold's definition of child abuse. Shengold asserts that overstimulation and deprivation do not automatically translate into child abuse; insisting that "these should be called child abuse and child deprivation only if 'economic' conditions of intensity, duration, or both cause enough psychic damage that the result can be described as soul murder."<sup>34</sup> The degree of pain that such a definition of abuse allows caregivers to inflict is the point that Miller's writings expose and attack.

Miller reports that the point of departure for her was initially the conviction that the key to understanding a person's entire later life is to understand their childhood.<sup>35</sup> As she became sensitized to the sufferings of childhood, Miller began to understand the plight of totally dependent children, the power that adults have over children, and society's sanction of that power. She wondered why the suffering of children had remained hidden so long. Then she answered her own question: adults allow themselves to believe that children need what the adults have decided to give them, and parents who have been abused want to hide their past or blame themselves for what happened.<sup>36</sup>

#### The Primacy of Personal Experience as Seen through Miller's Case Studies

As we enter into a review and assessment of Miller's case studies with the intent to increase our understanding of the potency of life experiences to shape a child's future,

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<sup>34</sup> Shengold's reference to economic conditions has to do with quantity and is probably related to his idea of too much "too-muchness" and too much "not-enoughness" (pp. 1-2).

<sup>35</sup> Alice Miller, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child, trans. Hildegarde Hannum and Hunter Hannum (New York: Meridian Books, 1986), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware, 6-7.

let us be mindful that even Miller admitted that it is difficult to avoid “a moralizing tone,” that it is not easy to avoid feelings of outrage towards abusers and feelings of pity for the abused.<sup>37</sup>

Because the forms that cruelty can take are countless and because the results of this cruelty so often go undetected, Alice Miller’s case studies can help to personalize the issue and to demonstrate the consequences associated with parental cruelty.<sup>38</sup> As we study several of Miller’s cases, the following list of psychological stages through which abused people pass should be kept in mind:

1. To be hurt as a small child without anyone recognizing the situation as such
2. To fail to react to the resulting suffering with anger
3. To show gratitude for what are supposed to be good intentions
4. To forget everything
5. To discharge the stored-up anger onto others in adulthood or direct it against oneself<sup>39</sup>

These stages, as delineated by Miller, will help us to understand the behavior of the characters in Miller’s case studies.

### Christiane

Miller introduces Christiane F. to us. The first six years of Christiane’s life seemed normal enough. Then the hurting began when her family moved from a familiar rural setting into a major city. The move alone was stressful. Then her father began to

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<sup>37</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 105.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 106.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 106.

treat her very harshly. There was no one to whom she could appeal. Her mother often stood, watched, and cried while Christiane was beaten mercilessly for imagined transgressions (not giving the proper response to a homework question soon enough, leaving a toy or item of clothing out of place, difficulty distinguishing between alphabets).<sup>40</sup> She was a young child being hurt and nobody intervened. Stage one is in place.

Christiane somehow loved and respected her father in spite of all that he did to her. Even though she was consciously afraid of him, she thought of him as superior to all other fathers. Christiane began to think that getting a beating was normal; she began to hit her little sister and force her to do the housework; she began to act in a manner that would give her father good reason to hit her.<sup>41</sup> Instead of hating her father, she loved him and tried to justify his behavior. Stages two and three are evident.

Christiane's repressed hostility toward her father was directed against other male authority figures. She intentionally provoked her male teachers, the building superintendent and the police, discharging her stored up anger on to others. She also directed her anger against herself when she turned to drug addiction. Miller reports that as time went by, Christiane did to herself the same thing her father had done. She

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<sup>40</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 110-11.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 112.



destroyed her own self-respect, used drugs to manipulate her feelings, and ruined both her body and soul. Stages four and five were apparent.<sup>42</sup>

The significance of Christiane's experience and of any person's experience, begins to come into focus when we ask: Why was Christiane dealt with so harshly? Miller unequivocally maintains that the parents' characters and temperaments have less to do with their abuse of children than the fact that they themselves were abused and not allowed to defend themselves.<sup>43</sup> These parents, when they were children themselves, were not allowed to express their anger and suffering. If they dared to give vent to anger, they ran the risk of losing their parent's love and affection. This early childhood anger, since it does not dare express itself, is stored in the unconscious where a significant amount of energy is required to keep it repressed. Negative consequences are usually associated with this scenario.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, when Christiane's father was beating her, he showed no sympathy because he had no empathy for the suffering he had experienced as a child. He beat her "for her own good" just like his parents told him they had beaten him "for his own good."<sup>45</sup> This is an example of what Miller calls "poisonous pedagogy"--the adult caregiver dealing

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<sup>42</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 112-13.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 105.

<sup>44</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 106.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 115. This calls to mind Paulo Freire's lament that an oppressive reality tends to absorb those within it. He observed that the oppressed tended to internalize the image of the oppressors as well as adopt the lifestyle of the oppressor. Freire, 29, 33.

harshly with a child and then attempting to justify this negative childrearing behavior as beneficial to the child.<sup>46</sup> The nightmare that Christiane experienced, which drove her to drug addiction began long before her birth. The abuse she experienced rose up out of her father's childhood experiences, experiences that would doom Christiane.

Two other questions come to mind. First, why are these horrible childhood experiences repressed? Second, why does the abused person reflect the abuser? As a small child Christiane's total dependence upon her parents had been exploited by them. She idealized both parents and blamed herself for disappointing and disgracing them.<sup>47</sup> Miller considers the Biblical commandment for children to honor their father and mother a major source of concern. This forbids the abused child the right to hate the parent. However, even if this commandment did not exist, the child still would not want to hate the parent because the child naturally loves mom or dad.<sup>48</sup> Christiane's tolerance of her father was unlimited. She remained proud of him and faithful to him, she was ever ready and quick to forgive and forget, she would not tell anyone about her beatings, and she tried desperately to understand and please her father.<sup>49</sup> How vast is a child's capacity for love!

In reviewing the five psychological stages, we note that the child has no external or internal control over the pain that a parent chooses to inflict on it. While Christiane

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<sup>46</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 15-16.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 109.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 118.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 118.

was in stage one (the small child being hurt with no one to intervene), her father was obviously in stage five (discharging stored up anger onto others in adulthood). As the previous paragraph described Christiane's attitudes toward her father, it seemed apparent that her capacity to love him, and her dependence upon him for survival, prevented her from reacting in anger, obliged her to be appreciative of his supposedly good intentions, and encouraged her to forget it all. Such is a child's love. Little wonder that for some the outbreak of energy is so forceful and fearsome in stage five!

Interestingly, Miller claims that the child does not retain the memory of the abusive experience or of the feelings stirred up by it because its sense of self has not yet sufficiently developed.<sup>50</sup> Because of this, the child may or may not remember that it was abused, but the suffering caused by the mistreatment will remain unconscious and will prohibit the child from sympathizing with others.<sup>51</sup> This absence of sympathy helps to explain Christiane's father's cruelty towards her. Miller indicates that the way people treat themselves and others for the rest of their lives is largely based on how they were treated as children.<sup>52</sup>

If we bring Miller's five psychological stages, along with Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of human development, to bear on Christiane as she moves into adulthood, we can imagine what might happen if she gave birth to a child. Under ideal

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 115.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 133.

circumstances, an infant and its mother learn from each other to give and to get. The infant learns to get what is given by the mother and the mother learns how best to give to meet the needs of the infant. Mother and infant influence each other. A mutual regulating of each other develops.<sup>53</sup> What happens if this mother is Christiane? If Miller is correct, Christiane is unlikely to have the emotional resources for this process of mutuality or to offer much empathy to her infant.

Erikson explains that where this mutual regulation fails, the social situation between the infant and the mother collapses and we cannot be sure what this does to the infant. This can lead to a radical disturbance in the infant's relationship to the mother, to people, and to the world.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the experience of abuse that a single child encounters is not the end of the pain. It seems destined to grow and precipitate another wave of pain.

### Adolf Hitler

The case of Adolf Hitler demonstrates how massive a wave of pain can be generated in consequence of one person's experience of abuse. Miller resorts to a case study of Hitler so that she can make the point that "human destructiveness is a reactive (and not an innate) phenomenon."<sup>55</sup> She is explaining her assumption that violence is more experience-based than genetically determined. Thus, she attempts to view what Hitler did through the eyes of his childhood. This is the question she asks:

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<sup>53</sup> Erik Erikson, Identity, 60-61.

<sup>54</sup> Erikson, Identity, 60-61.

<sup>55</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 142.

“What takes place in a child who is humiliated and demeaned by his parents on the one hand and on the other is commanded to respect and love those who treat him in this fashion and under no circumstances to give expression to his suffering?”<sup>56</sup>

Miller’s quest for an answer to this question led her to reject the legend that Klara Hitler was a good mother for young Adolf. She takes exception to the notion that Klara, who gave birth to three children within a span of thirty months and later watched all three die within a period of five to six weeks, was happy to be pregnant again and that she showered that child with all her love.<sup>57</sup> Rather, Klara was unsuccessful in coping with her grief over the deaths of three children and overcome with anxiety about being pregnant with another. Thus, Miller finds it inconceivable that the infant Adolf Hitler could have assimilated feelings of peace, contentment, and security along with his mother Klara’s milk. Miller thinks that it is more likely that Klara’s fears and anxieties were transmitted “directly to her baby as if mother and child were one body.”<sup>58</sup> Further, Alois Hitler’s failure to comfort his grieving wife gave rise to anger which she dared not express toward the self-centered man. Thus this anger and all other negative emotions festering within Klara’s heart were directed towards her defenseless infant, Adolf,<sup>59</sup> a

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<sup>56</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 145.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 181-82.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 182-83.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 183.

child who “never received love from any quarter,” hence was incapable of loving.<sup>60</sup> The world would pay.

Miller wants to demonstrate “how the early debasement, mistreatment, and psychological rape of a child expresses itself throughout later life.”<sup>61</sup> She wants to know what Hitler felt as a child, what he stored up on the inside as his father daily beat and demeaned him from the time he was quite young.<sup>62</sup>

Hitler, as a child, lived in constant jeopardy. Severe trauma and never-ending fear of his father were his hell.<sup>63</sup> The father’s rage was driven by the shame he had experienced in his childhood.<sup>64</sup> Miller’s concise summary of what the child Adolf experienced is revealing. She reports that little Adolf expected constant beatings, was resigned to the fact that he could do nothing about it but deny the pain and identify with the aggressor, and he knew that his battered mother could not risk trying to help him.<sup>65</sup> By the time his father died, Adolf had already internalized him.<sup>66</sup> Miller claims that Hitler was relentless in his efforts to forget the traumas of the beatings given by his

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<sup>60</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 181.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 145-46.

<sup>62</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 146.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 157.

<sup>64</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 157.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 163.

<sup>66</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 168.

father. As an adult, Hitler discharged his stored-up anger by subjugating the ruling class of Germany, winning the support of the masses, and forcing the governments of Europe to do his will.<sup>67</sup>

Nightmares tormented Hitler as an adult--nightmares of his father being in his room. He awoke in a panic, perspiring and uttering unintelligible phrases and reeling off figures. He had repressed his feelings of fear during childhood as he counted each blow received from his father. That repressed fear overtook him as an adult.<sup>68</sup> Miller's stage five discharge of stored-up anger burst out in a wave of violence that involved almost the whole world, and millions of Jews in particular. No genetic flaw can account for this rage. It was experience-based.

Miller complains that too many men and women believe that childhood matters are of little consequence.<sup>69</sup> Such folk insist on believing that there is no connection between childhood and later life.<sup>70</sup> Miller vigorously disagrees. She presents the case study of Adolf Hitler as evidence that a "personal tragedy lies hidden" behind every crime.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 173.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 174-75.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 177.

Miller adds this chilling statement for our consideration: "Only a child's unconscious can copy a parent so exactly that every characteristic of the parent can later be found in the child."<sup>72</sup> In case we failed to discern how profoundly impacting and consequential early childhood experiences are, let Ellen White join the discussion. She declared that children become susceptible to influences at a very early age: demoralizing influences and moral and spiritual influences. Any bias received at this early point impacts the character of the child as well as the child's destiny.<sup>73</sup> White assured her readers that everything that children see and hear makes deep impressions on their tender minds, impressions which cannot be erased by any later life-experience/s.<sup>74</sup>

#### Comparative Analysis and Critique of Miller and White on Negative Parenting

Miller's case study of Adolf Hitler graphically depicts how serious the consequences of negative parenting can be. It is important to note, however, that Miller is not suggesting that all victims of childhood abuse become abusers or criminals because children have so many different ways of dealing with their pain, and we can never know how a particular child will react to injustice.<sup>75</sup> A closer look at the role of Hitler's mother in his development provides a good entry point for engaging Ellen White and Alice Miller in dialogue.

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<sup>72</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 180.

<sup>73</sup> White, Mind, Character, 1:148.

<sup>74</sup> White, Mind, Character, 1:150-51.

<sup>75</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 177.



White and Miller agree on the profound nature of parental influences on children.

White, as noted earlier, placed special emphasis on the mother's influence. She maintained that the mother's thoughts and feelings would "have a powerful influence upon the legacy she gives her child."<sup>76</sup> We have noted how this point played out in Adolf Hitler's experience.

Long before Hitler rose to power, White had suggested that there were families of her day which appeared mannerly and well-ordered but would be exposed in the future as having been so in appearance only; these families would be shown to have been "under iron rule" which prevented the children from developing stable characters and trustworthy judgment, and that these children's lack of character would play itself out on a public stage.<sup>77</sup> According to Miller, when the dictator Adolf Hitler became a heartless persecutor, he was re-enacting scenes from his childhood, scenes which had been stored away somewhere deep in his psyche.<sup>78</sup> The child Adolf Hitler had retained in his being the experience of the brutal beatings he received from his father. He remembered seeing his mother watching without intervening. These remembered experiences would yield an

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<sup>76</sup> White, Adventist Home, 241.

<sup>77</sup> White, "Proper Education" (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3: 132-33.

<sup>78</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 145.

unwanted harvest.<sup>79</sup> Hence, the mass murders that Hitler was responsible for were, in part, a reflection of “the countless murders to which the child was subjected.”<sup>80</sup>

Ellen White was straightforward in expressing her conviction that the well-being of society was dependent on what happened in the privacy of its homes.<sup>81</sup> The essential connecting point between the home and the community at large are children, as demonstrated in the story of Adolf Hitler. These children will ultimately act out and share either the love and trust or the abuse and pain they have experienced at home. White claimed that the heads of families determine the character and quality of society,<sup>82</sup> in part because “children are what their parents make them by their instruction, discipline, and example.”<sup>83</sup> Miller’s presentation of the case study of Adolf Hitler illustrates White’s point. Klara Hitler’s submission to her husband, Alois, illustrates White’s contention that heads of families determine the character of society. Therefore, any hopes of reforming public virtue would have to begin in the home.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 192-93.

<sup>80</sup> Alice Miller, Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing (1905; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1942), 349.

<sup>82</sup> White, Ministry of Healing, 349.

<sup>83</sup> White, “Parental Training” (Testimony 31, 1882), Testimonies, 5: 37.

<sup>84</sup> White, Ministry of Healing, 349.

Though White generally regarded fathers as the heads of families and assigned considerable importance to their influence, at times she directed her comments specifically to mothers. There were times when she seemed at a loss as to the most effective way of communicating how important the mother's role is in determining the future of her children. The numerous accounts of her speaking to this issue testify to the urgency she felt surrounding the role of parents, especially mothers, in the care of children. She was distressed that so many Seventh-day Adventist parents were of the opinion that their job was done if they simply led their children to Jesus.<sup>85</sup> Knowing about Jesus was essential, but White insisted that there was more to do, much more. The children needed to be educated and trained, made ready to live and work in Christ's name. There was "molding, refining, and polishing" to be done. Character development needed to be addressed. There were eternal lessons which needed to be engraved upon the child's heart. White laid all of these burdens at the feet of the Christian mother, a woman who would answer to God for the manner in which she cared for her child.<sup>86</sup>

White informed the mothers of the Seventh-day Adventist church that, to a degree, the destiny of their children rested in their hands. She intimates that maternal failure could place children in the hands of Satan, causing them to become agents for the ruining of other lives.<sup>87</sup> White urged mothers to feel that every moment is valuable

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<sup>85</sup> White, Adventist Home, 234.

<sup>86</sup> White, Adventist Home, 234.

<sup>87</sup> White, Adventist Home, 238.

because their work will be assessed in the day of God's judgment when it will be shown that many human failures are the result of parental neglect or abuse.<sup>88</sup>

The potency of words, speech, and language should not be ignored. White contended that constant carping and reproof confuses children, destroys their initiative, and causes discouragement.<sup>89</sup> Children who grow up under close scrutiny and censure do not learn how to love, they learn to fear their parents.<sup>90</sup> Such a course of action by the parents destroys many of the best mental and emotional qualities within the child.<sup>91</sup>

We must not imagine that the close affinity of White and Miller's views just detailed means that Miller was echoing White. Such is not the case. They differ substantially on the issue of corporal punishment. Miller denounced the habit of spanking children. She termed it mindless, abusive, and destructive.<sup>92</sup> White urged pious parents to enter the disciplinary process with sympathetic hearts. She advised parents to begin by reasoning with the child and explaining why its behavior is unacceptable. Then, before administering the punishment, the parent was to pray with the child. The following quotation from White represents much of what Miller opposes.

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<sup>88</sup> White, Story of Patriarchs, 244.

<sup>89</sup> White, Education, 291.

<sup>90</sup> Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education (1913; reprint, Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 113; and Education, 289-90.

<sup>91</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, 113.

<sup>92</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 25-26.

“Then they will see that you do not punish them because they have put you to inconvenience, or because you wish to vent your displeasure upon them, but from a deep sense of duty for their good; and they will love and respect you [emphasis added].”<sup>93</sup>

As noted above, Miller wrote For Your Own Good to denounce the sentiments expressed in the phrase: “for their good.”<sup>94</sup> She believes that giving a child painful beatings which the child denies are painful leads to the child falsifying its feelings. She is adamant that Hitler had no compassion and became a mass murderer, in part, because of the painful beatings his father administered.<sup>95</sup> Under no circumstances is a child to be whipped.

Miller allows Jan Hunt, author of End Physical Punishment of Children, to carry the point further. Hunt declares that the statement “spare the rod and spoil the child” is a misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches and that outside of this statement attributed to King Solomon, there is no other biblical support for hitting children.<sup>96</sup>

Let us compare Miller’s (Hunt’s) position on corporal punishment with White’s position. Miller’s (Hunt’s) thinking allows for no form of corporal punishment while White’s position allows for spanking children as a last resort. The following quotations illustrate White’s position.

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<sup>93</sup> White, Child Guidance, 252-53.

<sup>94</sup> The title of the book that Miller wrote is: For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 25-26.

<sup>96</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 169.

The mother may ask, "Shall I never punish my child?" Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail; yet she should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime, to show the child that he does not hold the lines of control.

And when this step becomes necessary, the child should be seriously impressed with the thought that this is . . . done . . . for the child's own good.<sup>97</sup>

Brother L, have you considered what a child is, and whither it is going? Your children are the younger members of the Lord's family--brothers and sisters entrusted to your care by your heavenly father for you to train and educate for heaven. When you are handling them so roughly as you have frequently done, do you consider that God will call you to account for this dealing? You should not use your children thus roughly. A child is not a horse or a dog to be ordered about according to your imperious will, or to be controlled under all circumstances by a stick or whip, or by blows with the hand. Some children are so vicious in their tempers that the infliction of pain is necessary, but very many cases are made much worse by this manner of discipline.<sup>98</sup>

These comments by White present a curious mix of positions, when viewed from Miller's perspective--a mix which Miller would judge to be both unacceptable and dangerous because parents are still allowed to strike the child in God's name and to justify their action as being for the good of the child. White's positions calls to mind Shengold's definition of child abuse where parental actions against a child were deemed abusive and harmful only if conditions of intensity and duration result in sufficient psychic damage or soul murder.<sup>99</sup> Just as Miller repudiated Shengold's definition of abuse because of the pain that can be inflicted before the definition comes into operation,

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<sup>97</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, 116.

<sup>98</sup> White, "Severity in Family Government" (Testimony 17, 1869), Testimonies, 2: 259.

<sup>99</sup> Shengold, 2.

so would she reject White's position as being all the more hideous because of its religious grounding.

Let us take a look at Miller's reasons for condemning corporal punishment and all forms of child abuse (inflicting any type of pain for whatever reason). She aggressively advances the point that childhood traumas damage the human psyche, often contributing significantly to the psychic death of children. She considered the mistreatment of children the greatest of crimes one person could ever commit against another. The resultant life-long psychological deformation goes almost unnoticed.<sup>100</sup> The physical and mental abuse of children places them in the greatest danger in later life since it inclines them to destructiveness.<sup>101</sup> The painful realities of the abused child's world are so menacing that the child builds high walls within the psyche to screen the self away from them.<sup>102</sup> In order for this abused child to survive, it must totally repress the mistreatment, confusion, and neglect it suffered.<sup>103</sup>

A parent can inflict psychological damage by ignoring a child, denying any responsibility towards the child, refusing to answer a child's question, refusing or failing to protect the child, failing to care for the child's needs and again, administering painful

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<sup>100</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 96.

<sup>102</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 82.

beatings.<sup>104</sup> Thus Miller narrates how children can be seriously damaged by painful experiences in early life.

The connection of Miller's concerns with religion is raised by historian Philip Greven, who asserts that the most long-lasting and influential basis for the common practice of corporal physical punishment, both nationally and internationally, has been the Bible.<sup>105</sup> He reports that the attacks on children's bodies, wills, and spirits over the past two thousand years have been justified by selected proverbs of King Solomon.<sup>106</sup> This brings several questions to mind: How could King Solomon, the wisest of the wise, advocate striking a child with a rod? Or did Solomon know something about human nature that we do not now know? In the same spirit, Miller would ask White to explain how she, as a spokesperson for God, could permit even the most recalcitrant of children to be whipped?

As questions begin to generate questions, another one rises which Seventh-day Adventist adults must honestly face: How is it that a secular scholar, Alice Miller, seems to be advocating a more humane approach to disciplining children than the Lord's messenger? While addressing these items, keep in mind that a major objective of this dissertation is to generate an honest, defensible, and positive view of Ellen White. As the discussion with Miller now stands, I have not yet achieved my objective.

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<sup>104</sup> Miller, Breaking Down, 19, 25.

<sup>105</sup> Philip Greven, Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 6.

<sup>106</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 49.



### The Historical Context of Ellen White's Comments on Parenting

Any attempt to understand Ellen White or her Testimonies regarding parenting requires some familiarity with the social and historical contexts from which she spoke and wrote. The myth of White's being an inflexible prophet cannot be successfully dispelled without knowing her context, without knowing whether her counsel challenged existing conventions in parenting or whether she simply endorsed the parenting norms of her day. The insights of historian Philip Greven can help set the context in which White worked and from which she can answer the questions about her Testimonies regarding corporal punishment.

Greven endorses Alice Miller's basic position regarding the wrongness of inflicting pain on children.<sup>107</sup> He, too, believes that traumatic experiences are registered deep within our being, and that the impact of punishment permeates our lives, thoughts, culture, and world.<sup>108</sup> Greven adds that every generation which comes along seems driven to justify the pain associated with discipline, that as a part of this effort, elaborate rationales have been formulated to support its continuance. He identifies the Bible as the primary source for arguments in favor of physical punishment for many Christians. The Christian sector is not alone in its advocacy of corporal punishment. Greven alleges

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<sup>107</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 6-7.

<sup>108</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 10.

that, in addition to the Christian community, significant support for corporal punishment is found in the secular domain, particularly within educational settings.<sup>109</sup>

The advocates of corporal punishment are more diverse still. Legal and judiciary systems have consistently supported it. Greven continues by accusing the behavioral sciences of using punishments and supporting the use of pain to modify both animal and human behavior. Though Europe and North America stand accused, it is important to note that Greven identifies Protestant Christians as having been the most vocal public defenders of the physical punishment of infants, children, and adolescents.<sup>110</sup> Alice Miller probably would not be surprised by this revelation since her own research revealed “that 60 percent of German terrorists in recent years have been the children of Protestant ministers.”<sup>111</sup>

Greven examines the Biblical roots of this proclivity to violence. He surmises that there was a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. With only those options, a loving parent would think nothing about beating the hell out of a child.<sup>112</sup> It was for the child’s own good. Parents were to convey the impression that they were working on behalf of God as they inflicted all this pain on their children.<sup>113</sup> We are made to wonder just what was driving this habit. Greven has an answer. He acknowledges that

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<sup>109</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 46, 60-61.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 65.

<sup>112</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 55-60, 62-64.

<sup>113</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 64.

The focal point of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant child-rearing always has been the emerging wills of children. Breaking the child's will has been the central task given by successive generations of preachers, whose biblically based rationales for discipline have reflected the belief that self-will is evil and sinful.<sup>114</sup>

Greven alleges that, since the seventeenth century, evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants have urged that the child's will be crushed before the child is old enough to remember the pain associated with the accomplishment of this goal.<sup>115</sup> Thus, with this assertion, Greven leaves us to conclude that Protestants have a four hundred year old reliance on corporal punishment as an instrument of God for the saving of children's souls. We now take a closer look at some of the history of Protestant parenting.

Historian Edmund Morgan gives a general overview of New England Puritan parenting. He reports that the first duty, and legal responsibility, of New England Puritan parents was to see to the temporal needs of their children.<sup>116</sup> These children needed to be educated so that they could read scripture, thereby getting an edge on the Devil (whose chief weapon against humanity was to prevent the reading of scripture). Though these Puritans assumed that their children were born both ignorant and evil, they were not alarmed because both conditions could be overcome through education.<sup>117</sup> The push for education was all the more intense because salvation could not be realized by a

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<sup>114</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 65.

<sup>115</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 65.

<sup>116</sup> Edmund Morgan, The Puritan Family (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library, 1944), 28-29.

<sup>117</sup> Morgan, 48-51.

person who was ignorant of the doctrines of Christianity. Thus children were to be taught to the end that their ignorance and evil would be overcome and the door of salvation opened.<sup>118</sup>

Because children were evil by nature, there would be times when they would have to be restrained, perhaps forcefully. Even so, Morgan assures us that these Puritan children were probably whipped no more than children today.<sup>119</sup> Mind you, they had a maxim that it “would be better to be whipped than to be damned and still better to be persuaded than to be whipped.”<sup>120</sup>

Philip Greven divides the Puritan community into three camps and speaks of child-rearing from these perspectives: the authoritarians/evangelicals, the moderates, and the genteel. The evangelical Puritan parents loved, appreciated, and took pleasure in their children. However, their concept of human depravity led them to display mistrust, fear, and indifference in dealing with their children.<sup>121</sup> Greven wants to convey the point that when evangelical Puritan parents went to great lengths to safeguard the souls of their children, the motive behind it was love for the children.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Morgan, 46.

<sup>119</sup> Morgan, 57.

<sup>120</sup> Morgan, 59.

<sup>121</sup> Philip Greven, The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), 29.

<sup>122</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 31.

Tenderness and indulgence were viewed as the Achilles heel of discipline in evangelical Puritan homes. Parents were obliged to guard against both. Parental authority was unlimited and incontrovertible.<sup>123</sup> Thus, evangelical Puritans through the centuries have insisted that parents must break and control the will of children in the first few years of life.<sup>124</sup> Greven claims that even the venerable John Wesley advocated the breaking of the will in the interest of saving the child's soul. Thus, for religious reasons, strong measures could be taken to achieve this submission.<sup>125</sup>

The moderate Puritans were quite similar to the evangelical Puritans. They were different in their child-rearing philosophy: whereas the evangelicals' theme could be summed up as "love and fear," the theme for the moderates was "love and duty." The moderates did not wish to break the wills of their children.<sup>126</sup> The moderates seemed to have preferred to bend, mold, and shape the emerging personalities of their youngsters. To be sure, the moderates were no less effective in molding and shaping than the evangelicals were in breaking wills.<sup>127</sup>

The third, and final, group of Puritans that Greven identified were the genteel Puritans. They rose up in mid-seventeenth century America and continued unabated

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<sup>123</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 35.

<sup>125</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 35.

<sup>126</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 152.

<sup>127</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 151-52.

through the eighteenth century. The genteel parents had much in common with the parents in the moderate camp. By the middle of the eighteenth century, many of the genteel families had begun to raise their children in a way that seemed sinfully and dangerously indulgent to the moderates. These genteel families stressed correct and proper behavior, yet showed fond affection towards their children rather than stern discipline. Greven says that they were extraordinarily intense and binding in their affection and they were equally intensely aware of decorum and distance. “Love and reverence” was their theme. For them, fear was inconceivable and duty was taken for granted.<sup>128</sup>

Greven alleges that the evangelical call to break the will of children echoes still in letters and essays from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He accuses Susanna Wesley of subduing and conquering the wills of her children by frequent painful whippings (a routine that her children knew from the cradle throughout childhood).<sup>129</sup> An article from The Mothers Magazine of 1834 had a woman arguing that while the conversion of a child was not the result of physical punishment, any child who had learned to yield “unconditional and unquestioning obedience” to its parents would have less difficulty submitting to God than a child who has not been so tamed.<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup> Greven, Protestant Temperament, 265.

<sup>129</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 66.

<sup>130</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 69-70.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries find fundamentalist Protestants equally committed to making certain that children obey.<sup>131</sup>

Greven reminds us that the commitment to corporal punishment is yet alive and well. He explains that the current commitment to corporal punishment within present day fundamentalist-Protestant minds is the conviction “that God has willed it and requires it.”<sup>132</sup> Greven mentions a number of Christian authors of this persuasion: Larry Christenson’s popular book, The Christian Family (1970), presents the rod as the unquestionable biblical method of discipline. In How to Rear Children (1972), Christian minister Jack Hyles echoes Mrs. Wesley’s sentiments that beating a child helps to keep it out of hell. Roy Lessin’s Spanking: Why, When, How? (1979) asserts that “spanking is God’s idea” and is an expression of parental love. J. Richard Fugate’s book, What the Bible Says About...Child Training (1980) also supports spanking because God’s word says we ought to. Larry Tomczak’s God, the Rod, and Your Child’s Bod: The Art of Loving Correction for Christian Parents (1982) is of the same ilk, as is Beverly La Haye’s How to Develop Your Child’s Temperament (1977). Greven seems particularly alarmed by La Haye’s call for parents to spank as often as necessary so that the child who persists in crying after being punished will learn not to express feelings of anger and rage. And Chuck Dobson’s Dare to Discipline attempts to lighten our spirits by assuring us

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<sup>131</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 70-71.

<sup>132</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 61.

that, inasmuch as a little pain goes a long way, beating a child into submission should not be necessary.<sup>133</sup>

Greven has given us a quick review of four hundred years of the history of child-rearing practices as it impinges upon our subject. That review shows a long-standing commitment to corporal punishment within the Protestant tradition. Let us examine Ellen White in the context of this history. When she is compared with writers whose work would have informed her time and with authors writing at her time, how does she compare? Is she less enlightened, equally enlightened or in the dark? Is she behind her time or in advance of her time? In light of this discussion, was she a credible spokesperson for God at the time she wrote and spoke on this issue?

### White's Prophetic Stance

One reference from Greven will make a direct connection between his work and Alice Miller's. That connection will put us in touch with the writers from Ellen White's time. Greven writes:

In *For Your Own Good*, Alice Miller extensively quotes German and other European sources from the eighteenth century to the present concerning the breaking and controlling of children's wills. The texts' interchangeability with those from English and American sources is indicative of the omnipresence of such views throughout both Europe and America for many centuries. They are so much alike that any reader who compares the quotations in this book with those in Miller's surely will be conscious, as never before, of the pervasiveness of what Miller labels "poisonous pedagogy."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 61-63, 69, 79.

<sup>134</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 65.



Let us address the question of breaking and /or controlling the will of children as seen in White's writings. White's concern for the well-being of society is reflected in her concern for the well-being of children. Of all the harm that parents could inflict on children, there was one indignity which White believed would be more costly to society than all others: the breaking of the child's will. White begged parents to make a distinction between training and education, between training animals and educating children. She explained that animals needed training because they have neither reason nor intellect; but because children have an "intelligent will," that will must be taught how to control the whole human organism. The child must not yield its autonomy to a parent and neither should the parent force the issue.<sup>135</sup>

Adolf Hitler is an extreme example of what Ellen White was hoping to prevent. Because she was so certain that no good could possibly result from compromising the individuality of a child, she advised parents to guide and mold the will instead of crushing it. "Save the strength of the will; in the battle of life it will be needed."<sup>136</sup>

Thus White warned of dire consequences associated with breaking children's wills and considered the practice evidence of poor parenting. She gave counsel regarding certain things which the parents were to be especially sensitive to. The child's development was to receive direction from parents, yet the parents were to avoid the tendency to over control. White advised that too much parental management could give

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<sup>135</sup> White, "Proper Education" (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:132.

<sup>136</sup> White, Education, 288- 89.

rise to a hidden rebellious spirit. No attempt should be made to control the “mind, will, or conscience” of children; certain evil would result from such a course.<sup>137</sup>

Miller would be pleased to know that White was unequivocally against the breaking of a child’s will. Any parental act, word, or attitude that challenged the autonomy of a child’s will was denounced by White. She contended that the act of “breaking the will” is contrary to the principles of heaven. She pleaded with parents to direct and guide the will of children. “Save all the strength of the will, for the human being needs it all; but give it proper direction. Treat it wisely and tenderly, as a sacred treasure. Do not hammer it to pieces; but by precept and example wisely fashion and mold it until the child comes to years of responsibility.”<sup>138</sup> On this issue, White is unique. She was not endorsing contemporary parenting conventions of her day. Having said that, Alice Miller reminds us that White would allow whippings as a last resort.

Let us look first at the argument of “the last resort.” Greven reports that this argument has existed among Christian moderates for the last four hundred years, being advocated by persons as diverse as John Locke and Benjamin Spock (the young Dr. Spock).<sup>139</sup> Earlier in this chapter, we read a quotation in which White recommended

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<sup>137</sup> White, Education, 288.

<sup>138</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, 116.

<sup>139</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 82.

whipping a child only when “other resorts fail.”<sup>140</sup> By Greven’s definition, White appears to be of the moderate tradition on this point.

A closer look is necessary if we are to discern differences between White’s position and those of others who advocated whipping children as a fact of daily life. Read closely: “But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime . . . .”<sup>141</sup> Yes, White allowed for whippings. But, if her advice is followed, a child might receive only one in a life-time. That is a significantly different stance on the issue. Furthermore, as White wrote this advice, there is the feeling that she is writing with the same craftiness that the Apostle Paul wrote to Philemon. Was Paul’s tact a not-so-subtle way of undermining the institution of slavery? Do you remember White’s advice to Brother L.?

Brother L. was guilty of handling his children roughly and White rebuked him. It was in her letter to Brother L. that she mentioned that some children had such vicious tempers that it might be necessary to inflict pain to get their attention. Even so, White warned that there was a price tag attached to such parental behavior. She had more to say to Brother L:

You should control yourself. Never correct your children while impatient or fretful, or while under the influence of passion. Punish them in love, manifesting the unwillingness you feel to cause them pain. Never raise

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<sup>140</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, 116.

<sup>141</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, 116.

your hand to give them a blow unless you can with a clear conscience bow before God and ask His blessing upon the correction you are about to give.<sup>142</sup>

She urged him to foster love in the hearts of his children and to teach them self-control.

Brother L was not to give his children the impression that they must submit to his arbitrary control because he was stronger than they. She cautioned him that ruling his home by brute force would ruin his family.<sup>143</sup>

White did not forbid Seventh-day Adventist parents from whipping their children. She did point out that there were serious consequences associated with brutality. How could a person go before God with a clear conscience and ask for God's blessing on a whipping? Was White sowing seeds that would eat the heart out of an abusive practice? Was she perceptive enough to realize that the practice of beating children and breaking their wills was so much a part of the people's mode of being that it would be futile for even a prophet to attack it head on? And so, like Paul, she approached it in a non-confrontational manner? That is how I would interpret it, and a closer look at how she personally related to children will lend further credence to this conclusion.

#### White's Personal Example as a Parent

How did White herself deal with children? Perhaps Miller would demand to know. White raised a number of children besides her own, and she claims that she never let any of them think that they could annoy her. She reports that she never allowed

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<sup>142</sup> White, "Severity in Family Government" (Testimony 17, 1869), Testimonies, 2: 259-60.

<sup>143</sup> White, "Severity in Family Government" (Testimony 17, 1869), Testimonies, 2: 260.

herself to say a harsh word to a child (sometimes the words would come to mind but she would go off and pray for a while before taking up the matter with the child). She reported, "They never got the better of me once--not once, to provoke me to anger."<sup>144</sup> She boasted that she never hit one of her children, that she never even raised her voice when dealing with disciplinary matters.<sup>145</sup>

There were simple reasons behind White's refusal to hit a child. White warned that striking children could encourage them to become quarrelsome and violent. But the arresting reason was that, since parents stand in the place of God to their children, they must carefully guard their own behavior.<sup>146</sup>

Thus it appears that White would have agreed with Greven's assertion that there is a close correspondence between a person's concept of God and their disciplinary patterns.<sup>147</sup> Rizzuto likewise would remind us that concepts of God are experience related--related especially to experiences shared with parents. White's view of God forbade her striking a child.

This is commendable; however, did White always practice what she preached in other areas of parenting? I will list three key components of her counsel to Adventist parents so that we can see how she measured up to the standard she enunciated.

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<sup>144</sup> White, Child Guidance, 253-54.

<sup>145</sup> White, Child Guidance, 254.

<sup>146</sup> White, Child Guidance, 251.

<sup>147</sup> Greven, Spare the Child, 13.

1. Fathers and mothers should be the first teachers of their children.<sup>148</sup>

Parents should be their children's only teachers until the age of eight to ten.<sup>149</sup>

2. Education begins with the infant in its mother's arms.<sup>150</sup>

3. The character building of children is of more importance than cultivating farms, building houses to live in, or pursuing any manner of business or trade.<sup>151</sup>

Now let us examine how White related to these components in the raising of her own children.

She gave birth to four sons. Henry Nichols, the eldest, was born August 26, 1847. When Henry was ten months old, White left him for several weeks in the care of Clarissa Bonfoey so that she and her husband could travel to western New York state to attend an important Bible conference.<sup>152</sup> Some time later, Henry was left in the care of the Howland family. He lived with them for five years. During this time, the Howlands were responsible for his total care and upkeep. Ellen White took a present to Henry once a year.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> White, Child Guidance, 21.

<sup>149</sup> White, "Close Confinement at School" (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:137.

<sup>150</sup> White, Child Guidance, 26.

<sup>151</sup> White, Child Guidance, 169.

<sup>152</sup> White, Life Sketches, 105, 110.

<sup>153</sup> White, Life Sketches, 120.

White's second son, James Edson, was born July 29, 1849. He began to move about with his parents when he was only six weeks old. In the spring of 1850, Edson was left the care of Clarissa Bonfoey while his parents went on their way "to do the will of God" in Vermont and Maine. The Whites returned five months later and found Edson in poor health and had difficulty suppressing "murmuring thoughts."<sup>154</sup> Thus we find two year and eight month-old Henry in Maine with the Howlands and nine month-old Edson in New York with Ms. Bonfoey.

Are the Whites following her counsel? James and Ellen White did not serve as the first and only teachers of their first two children. Henry and Edson spent little time as infants in their mothers arms and obviously the Whites allowed their work to come before raising their own children. How did White, herself, understand this?

Her heart longed after her children and she sought answers from God as to the course she and her husband should follow. In 1850, while very despondent about her extended absences from her children, White had asked an angel why she could not be with her children and enjoy their company. She was told to be faithful to her duties as a prophet and trust God (implying that God would make certain that her children were cared for).<sup>155</sup> It appears that White was never reconciled to having to be away from her children for the sake of God's work. Perhaps it is best to allow her to speak in her own voice to these issues. In 1852 she wrote,

Although the cares that came upon us in connection with the publishing work and other branches of the cause involved much perplexity, the greatest

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<sup>154</sup> White, Life Sketches, 127, 131, 135.

<sup>155</sup> White, Life Sketches, 132.

sacrifice which I was called to make in connection with the work was to leave my children frequently to the care of others.

Henry had been from us five years, and Edson had received but little of our care . . . . And I have inquired: Does God require so much of us, and leave others with no burdens? Is this equality? Are we to be thus hurried from one care to another, one part of the work to another, and have but little time to bring up our children?<sup>156</sup>

The answer she had been given in 1850 was still being challenged by her in 1852. She decided, yet again, however, to submit to God's will and not allow her children to keep her from what she understood as her prophetic calling.

What are we to make of this? Are there principles at work here that will help us to understand the variance between her teachings and her practice? I would like to suggest that White presented the ideal, but recognized that there were times when circumstances required a different course of action.<sup>157</sup> We have already seen how choosing between the duties of parenthood and the duties of the prophetic office was an intense struggle for her. We must note that when she chose to give priority to the prophetic calling, she did not neglect her children. She placed Henry in the home of the Howlands because she had complete confidence in them and because she was certain that they would give him better care than she and her husband could if they were to take Henry on the road with them.<sup>158</sup> She also felt comfortable leaving Edson in the care of Clarissa Bonfoey, whom she described as "a precious child of God," possessing a

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<sup>156</sup> White, Life Sketches, 165.

<sup>157</sup> White, "Counsel Regarding Age of School Entrance," Selected Messages, 3:217.

<sup>158</sup> White, Life Sketches, 120.



cheerful and happy disposition that was never gloomy, yet not frivolous.<sup>159</sup> Thus it is obvious that White realized that adherence to the ideal was not always practical or possible.

We also need to consider the timing and the context in which her counsel was given. The suggestion that parents should be their children's only teachers until they are eight to ten years old was given at a time when there were no Adventist church schools. She felt that the public schools were unacceptable for early childhood education. Later, after Adventist church schools had been established, there were parents who continued to adhere rigidly to her counsel regarding parents being the only teachers of their small children. Ellen White reminded the people that since the time she had first given the counsel, the circumstances had changed. She urged them to use common sense in relating to the altered conditions.<sup>160</sup>

Common sense was also to be used in selecting parenting methods. White advised mothers that parenting techniques were not universally applicable. Therefore, mothers were advised to study the experiences of others and to test the methods that appeared to have value. The mother's circumstances and the temperament and disposition of each child were variables which had to be considered.<sup>161</sup>

The flexibility that White exhibited in her parenting and in the application of her own counsel suggests how we might relate to her Testimonies. An understanding of

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<sup>159</sup> White, Life Sketches, 123.

<sup>160</sup> White, "Counsel Regarding Age of School Entrance," Selected Messages, 3:216-17.

<sup>161</sup> White, Child Guidance, 32.

context and the use of common sense are essential. The dialogue with Miller has helped to clarify and expand White's position. Furthermore, it has provided insights on how White's enduring teachings can be appropriated.

## CHAPTER 5

### Socialization/Enculturation in the Child's Spiritual Formation

This particular effort to facilitate the re-engagement of Adventist youth with the Testimonies of Ellen White brings us to an encounter with the socialization/enculturation model of spiritual formation. White's emphasis on parental influences on children has provided the lens through which to view her in dialogue with Ana-Maria Rizzuto and Alice Miller. Rizzuto insists that God is a cultural construct. This construct can be used privately or publicly to rework our primary relationships. This implies that the representational process is a psychological aspect of human socialization in general.<sup>1</sup> However, she makes a potential connection to the religious aspects of socialization when she posits that children can use their private God for religious purposes and that each culture has its own god/s to whom its children will be formally introduced.<sup>2</sup>

Rizzuto claims that official religion comes to a child sometime after the child's private God representation is already formed. Hence, formal religious education (faith enculturation) plays no part in the creation of the child's personal God, but it can introduce the child to the God of official religion and seek to facilitate the merger of the two.<sup>3</sup> Whereas religious education cannot contribute directly to the formation of the child's original God representation, and inasmuch as the God representation formed could be either positive or negative as a result of formative experiences with caregivers, how

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<sup>1</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 179.

<sup>2</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 8, 179.

<sup>3</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 9-10.

can religious education contribute to a child's development of a positive God representation? Furthermore, since any contribution that religious education would make to the formation of a child's original God representation must be made through the primary caregivers (parents), how can religious education directly impact caregivers so that it can indirectly facilitate the child's creation of a positive God representation? The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Ellen White and selected socialization/enculturation theorists answer these questions and to demonstrate how the socialization/enculturation model clarifies White's position regarding the importance of co-operation between the home, church, and school in the spiritual formation of children.

#### White's Socialization Model

God's ideal for the socialization of children, according to White, is that they be adopted into the heavenly family while they are still young and become members of the household of faith.<sup>4</sup> She sets a high standard of attainment: "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness--godlikeness--is the goal to be reached."<sup>5</sup> All who are involved in the spiritual care of children are doing a noble work. They are privileged to cooperate with God in molding the character of the young and awakening in them a desire to reach God's ideal.<sup>6</sup> White suggests that the home, church, and church school cooperate in this enculturation process.

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<sup>4</sup> White, Child Guidance, 486.

<sup>5</sup> White, Education, 18.

<sup>6</sup> White, Education, 18.

White maintains that mothers and fathers are primarily responsible for introducing their children to God and spiritual things. This training should begin in infancy and continue throughout youth. She states that parents cannot be too careful with their words and examples because children are very perceptive. There should be no cold, stern behavior but an atmosphere of warmth and love. She says that religion should be practiced at home as much as in the house of worship.<sup>7</sup>

White contends that the spiritual nourishment of children is a god-given responsibility. Parents are God's appointed guardians of children, responsible for their religious instruction and character formation, according to White. Parents are reminded that, because children are so perceptive, negative examples also impact them, therefore parents should closely monitor with whom their children associate.<sup>8</sup>

White states that children's lives should be happy and she calls for more "sunshiny parents" who make the Christian life and God attractive.<sup>9</sup> She tells Christian mothers that they can bless the world by giving careful attention to their children's spiritual development, beginning in infancy. Christian fathers are instructed to bind their children to God by being a friend and companion to them.<sup>10</sup>

In the work of child training, the church is to be an ally of the home. White asserts that God has appointed the church to jealously watch over and care for its

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<sup>7</sup> White, Child Guidance, 486-87.

<sup>8</sup> White, "Words to Parents," 18 Dec. 1900, 801.

<sup>9</sup> White, "Words to Parents," 29 Jan. 1901, 65.

<sup>10</sup> White, "An Appeal," 8.

children. White challenges the church to exert every influence in its power to win the love of its children. Ministers and members should help parents to bind children's hearts to God and guide them in their spiritual formation.<sup>11</sup>

White informs church members that they are to assist parents in teaching children and in providing additional role models for them. She advises churches to establish Sabbath School classes for all age groups. Those who teach in the children's classes are advised that they can bind the children's hearts to theirs through tactfulness, wisdom, love, and affection. White assures the church that children will respond positively to such heartfelt devotion and care.<sup>12</sup>

Churches, in addition, are to assist parents by establishing church schools. White notes that God intends to use these church schools as an aid to parents and wants the teachers to work closely with parents in furthering the spiritual development of children.<sup>13</sup> Inasmuch as teachers are expected to help parents, so parents are admonished to support teachers and not criticize them in the presence of their children. White advises parents and teachers that their demeanor--at home, at church, at Sabbath school, or at church school--impacts the children under their influence. Dignified, cold, and unsympathetic

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Necessity of Co-operation with God," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 25 Oct. 1892, 657.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, Counsels on Sabbath School Work, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938), 81.

<sup>13</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, 165-67.

adults chill to death some of the most valuable qualities of children's minds and hearts.

White challenges parents and teachers:

Smile, parents; smile, teachers. If your heart is sad, let not your face reveal the fact. Let the sunshine from a loving, grateful heart light up the countenance. Unbend from your iron dignity, adapt yourselves to the children's needs, and make them love you. You must win their affection, if you would impress religious truth upon their heart.<sup>14</sup>

White contends that every child has the potential to form a character of integrity and to live a useful life. Hence, parents and teachers, as God's representatives, are to direct children's development without harming them by undue control. Instead, they are to teach children self-control. This training will prove useful and successful.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, White presents the home, the church, and the church school as the primary agencies for teaching and socializing children into the Christian lifestyle. While all three institutions are called upon to lead children to God, White assigns primary responsibility to the parents.

#### The Socialization/Enculturation Model in Dialogue with White, Rizzuto, and Miller

Religious education theorists of socialization like Horace Bushnell, George Albert Coe, C. Ellis Nelson, and John Westerhoff assert that children come to faith in a relational context, that "our children will have faith if we have faith and are faithful."<sup>16</sup> If this is true, and this dissertation endorses that assumption, then it is imperative that Seventh-day Adventist parents, teachers, and youth leaders give attention to the social

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<sup>14</sup> White, Fundamentals, 68.

<sup>15</sup> White, Education, 287-89.

<sup>16</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 126.

context in which this process unfolds. This engagement of socialization theorists provides another means by which to evaluate Ellen White's Testimonies regarding parental influences on children.

Horace Bushnell: The Power of Parental Examples and Prenatal Influences

It is apropos that Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) be called upon to introduce the socialization models of spiritual formation since he is considered by many to be the father of the Christian education movement in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Bushnell's insights are used because of his emphasis on the potency of parental examples on children's spiritual development and because of the prophetic tenor of his warnings about negative parenting. It may be of interest to note that the latter years of his ministry and the early years of the ministry of Ellen White (1827-1915) coincide. Furthermore, they both began their ministry in New England, but also worked elsewhere. Thus they worked within a similar historical context.

The Christian faith that Bushnell envisions children developing rests firmly on the experiences those children share with others, primarily with their parents. Bushnell sets the stage for us by declaring "that a child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise."<sup>18</sup> The insights chronicled below have been gleaned from his Christian Nurture (1861) which, according to Thomas Groome, is still regarded as a

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<sup>17</sup> John M. Mulder, introduction to Christian Nurture by Horace Bushnell (1861; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), vii.

<sup>18</sup> Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture (1861; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 10.



masterpiece in Christian religious education.<sup>19</sup> Bushnell is quick to inform his readers that the concept of growing up a Christian did not originate with him. He insists that this doctrine is as old as the Christian church itself,<sup>20</sup> and that there is no absurdity associated with the idea of a child growing up in Christ.<sup>21</sup> This work is to begin in the homes of Christian families. The Holy Spirit is to be given room to work in the lives of the parents and then this “domestic Spirit” is to begin its sanctifying work with the child from the womb onwards.<sup>22</sup>

Bushnell’s reference to the womb suggests that prenatal influences are the beginning of religious education. Herein lies the beginning of an answer as to how religious education can contribute to a child’s development of a positive God representation. The first contribution is to acknowledge the reality and potency of prenatal influences; then, by teaming up with C. Ellis Nelson, teach adults, especially young adults, how to make the pre-birth environment as commodious as possible.

Ellen White comments that too many Adventists parents believe that prenatal influences are unimportant.<sup>23</sup> She insists that the clothing, surroundings, diet and disposition of the mother make significant contributions to the health, disposition, and

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas H. Groome, Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1980), 117.

<sup>20</sup> Bushnell, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Bushnell, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Bushnell, 19-20.

<sup>23</sup> White, Ministry of Healing, 372.

moral character of the unborn child.<sup>24</sup> She urges fathers to bear the burden of the mother's pregnancy by being especially congenial, courteous, tender, and "attentive to all her wants."<sup>25</sup>

After the birth of the child, according to Bushnell, the family home is to be the childhood church and everything that happens within the house or lives of the family is to be consecrated to the "christianizing" of the children. Bushnell's model calls for truly sweet Christian parents who are fully committed to God and their children. The children are expected to model their parents. This approach involves much more than teaching, it involves a way of life.<sup>26</sup>

Bushnell wants to see children nurtured/socialized into oneness with God. Because he believes that there is no other age at which human beings are as tender and impressionable, Godly parents are to begin this socializing process at the earliest moments of life. The gospel is to be embodied in every parent.<sup>27</sup> For Bushnell, human experience is the key element in the process of a person coming to know God.<sup>28</sup> White, likewise, advises parents to allow the grace and truth that characterized the life of Christ

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<sup>24</sup> Ellen G. White, "Extremes in Health Reform" (Testimony 18, 1870), Testimonies, 2:381-83; and Counsels on Health and Instruction to Medical Missionary Workers, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications (1923; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1951), 79.

<sup>25</sup> White, "Health Reform," (Testimony 18, 1870), Testimonies, 2:381-83.

<sup>26</sup> Bushell, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Bushell, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Mulder, introduction to Christian Nurture, vii-xxxii.

to be manifest in their lives and to begin to educate and train their children from babyhood while the mind is “the most impressible.”<sup>29</sup>

Citing the Biblical injunction, “Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it,” Bushnell urges that children be trained or related to in such a way that they will grow up pious and not need to experience conversion at some point in later life.<sup>30</sup> I should mention that Bushnell is presenting an either/or situation. He is saying that since children are born with corrupt human natures, and if they are ever to become Christian, parents must either train the children (raise them as Christians) or let them face the experience of conversion later.<sup>31</sup> This is one of the few pessimistic notes in Christian Nurture in that it implies that, if left alone, children would not naturally become Christian. Perhaps it reinforces Bushnell’s point that becoming Christian is a relational process.

Being aware of the dangers of negative parental examples, Bushnell raises a cogent question to his readers, which I paraphrase: “How can so many remarkably pious persons produce such ungodly children?” These parents were paragons of virtue in the eyes of the public, yet exceedingly disagreeable within their homes.<sup>32</sup> Ellen White asks a

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<sup>29</sup> White, Child Guidance, 66, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Bushnell, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Bushnell, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Bushnell, 48.

similar question: “Why are the children of religious parents so often headstrong, defiant, and rebellious?” White, like Bushnell, blamed it on the parents.<sup>33</sup>

Bushnell anticipates Alice Miller’s denunciation of the rod. He condemns its use. He acknowledges the need for family government. He advocates a form of authority that does not reside in the rod, but rather is based on “a truly good and sanctified life.”<sup>34</sup> He mocks parents who storm about the house with loud words and violent actions; he calls them heathen. He chides such parents for finding it easier “to be violent than to be holy,” for battering and bruising and savaging their children, and “for crushing that sensibility which is the hope of their being.”<sup>35</sup> Bushnell laments the way that the spirit of children is “kiln-dried” in the “hot furnace of motherly or fatherly passion,” never again to reach out to God.<sup>36</sup> That such things can be done “in the sacred name of Christ Jesus” is an outrage!<sup>37</sup>

Bushnell lamented the sad state of piety prevailing in his day. He insisted that the atmosphere surrounding Christians was one of hardness, rudeness, and insensitivity to things in the affective domain. There was a lack of “domesticity of character”

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<sup>33</sup> White, Adventist Home, 310.

<sup>34</sup> Bushnell, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Bushnell, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Bushnell, 294-96.

<sup>37</sup> Bushnell, 57.

(loveliness, purity, blamelessness).<sup>38</sup> Bushnell issued a call to the churches to give attention to the duties of domestic life. He wanted the home environment to exude a spirit of love that would bathe “the life of childhood.”<sup>39</sup> He longed for something better than teaching. He called for a warm, congenial, and cheerful environment to be created “about the young soul.”<sup>40</sup> He did not have access to the insights of psychology and psychoanalysis to assure him that there were major principles that could substantiate his plea for a loving home environment.

Bushnell maintains that the gospel is communicated to children long before it is taught in words and that it is “wrapped up in the life of every Christian parent”; the truth that is essential to the life of a child is most likely mediated through the parent by looks, manners, and lifestyle.<sup>41</sup> This is strikingly similar to object relations. Look again at what Rizzuto reports that children remember about their objects: their eyes and looks, their hands, bodies, gestures, postures, their appeal, and their implicit and explicit messages.<sup>42</sup> Ellen White would join this chorus by telling her readers that education encompasses all of a person’s life experiences from before birth all the way through adulthood because infants and children carefully notice not only what the parents say and do, but also the

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<sup>38</sup> Bushnell, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Bushnell, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Bushnell, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Bushnell, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 57.

spirit in which they act and speak.<sup>43</sup> This is spiritual socialization at work, whether it is positive or negative.

According to Ellen White, religious education will never accomplish all that it might until the importance of parental duties is correctly perceived and the parents trained to carry them out. She indicates that if religious education would make a contribution to the development of a child's God representation, it should inform potential parents (as well as parents) that careful and thorough preparation for parenthood is requisite. Further, religious education should help these potential parents to become familiar with the laws of physical development. They should understand the laws of mental development and moral training, along with the laws of and the prenatal influences of physiology, hygiene, heredity, sanitation, dress, and exercise. Thus, White advocates a religious education that can help the world to be a better place and contribute to the child's development of a representation of God by teaching adults how to be good parents/caregivers.<sup>44</sup>

#### George Albert Coe: The Experiential Base of a Child's Learning

Professor George Albert Coe (1862-1951) wanted to make the world a better place. He taught theology and philosophy at both the University of Southern California and Northwestern University and was a professor of religious education at Union

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<sup>43</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Duty of Parents to Children" (Manuscript 58, 1899), Manuscript Releases from the Files of the Letters and Manuscripts Written by Ellen G. White, 21 vols.(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association; and Silver Springs, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981-86), 7:7.

<sup>44</sup> White, Education, 276.

Theological Seminary from 1909 until 1922. Influenced by John Dewey, Coe was considered a leader of the liberal trends in religious education and a major contributor to the Religious Education Association.<sup>45</sup> One of Coe's contributions to the socialization model of spiritual formation is captured by his emphasis on the communal nature of being spiritual. For him, the aim of religious education is not to impose truth upon children, rather to promote their overall growth, especially their social consciousness.<sup>46</sup> To that end, Coe urges that children be taught that in order to know God, we all must be socially intelligent; that to make God's will our own is a matter of social practice; that this whole issue of consecration to God is a vocational concept.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of personal experiences is discerned as we note that Coe believes that a child is made in the image of God as that child's self is formed in the give-and-take with others.<sup>48</sup> Rizzuto would say that the child forms its image of God in/from the give and take with others. Either way, the image of God is formed as a result of experiences shared with others.

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<sup>45</sup> Eugene S. Gibbs, "Biographical Sketch of George Albert Coe," in A Reader in Christian Education, ed. Eugene Gibbs (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 247-48.

<sup>46</sup> George Albert Coe, A Social Theory of Religious Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 64.

<sup>47</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 72.

<sup>48</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 73.

Coe refuses to separate knowing and believing from the enterprise of living.<sup>49</sup> He wants all generations to live together and interact with each other. The child's social thinking is influenced from infancy by its contacts with society. Its actual practices with respect to others tend, from the beginning, to become fixed as a permanent mode of life. Thus, there is no neutral period in which social training must wait. Training, intentional and unintentional, is continuous.<sup>50</sup>

Coe maintains that the pupil is in contact with the social order from infancy. Through this contact with the social order, the child is forming habits and predispositions of its thinking with respect to individual people and society.<sup>51</sup> It is a big mistake to postpone introducing children to the real issues of life until parents think that they are old enough to understand them. It is poor thinking because by the time the parents decide to give the instruction, the child will have already learned it through personal observations. Why postpone in education what cannot be delayed in the child's social experience?<sup>52</sup>

Coe's idea calls for pupils to participate together with their elders in Christian activities that addressed social welfare, social justice, and a world society.<sup>53</sup> Every Christian's life-work is to help, in their sphere of influence, to rebuild society. The

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<sup>49</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 68.

<sup>50</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 60-61.

<sup>52</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 61.

<sup>53</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 69.



energies of the Christian are to be intentionally turned to this task.<sup>54</sup> The Christian experience of pupils is to grow through social interactions. To this end, adults are to create an environment in which love is experienced, practiced, and built into daily life. The development of faith lies down this path.<sup>55</sup>

Coe details how home, church, and school were to work together causing the pupils attachments to expand from a limited number of persons to include an ever-widening group. Here family loyalties combine into humane concerns of the widest possible extent. Coe wants the Sunday school to enlarge its social consciousness into a school consciousness and this into a church consciousness; and the whole is to flow out toward the needs of the world.<sup>56</sup> The goal of Coe's concept of socialization is that such social behavior as described above becomes natural, thus turning the voice of God and the voice of human need into one.<sup>57</sup> There is a service orientation to Coe's position. Becoming Christian happens in an environment where other Christians are actively working to make the world a better place. Thus, it seems that an urgent task of religious education is to help Christians learn how to work together and not be so individualistic. But, who will teach them?

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<sup>54</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 70.

<sup>55</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 80.

<sup>56</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 80-81.

<sup>57</sup> Coe, Social Theory, 83.

### C. Ellis Nelson: Providing a Pedagogical Tool

C. Ellis Nelson proposes ways and means whereby adults can be taught how to be what they ought to be and how to do what they ought to do. Nelson has been professor of Practical Theology and head of the Department of Religious Education at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Thomas Groome introduces Nelson as the one who brought a fresh push to the socialization model just when it seemed to be at a low point.<sup>58</sup> Groome informs us that the main contention of Nelson's Where Faith Begins is that the core of religion is located within an individual's sentiments and that this religion took shape during childhood as the child was being socialized by the adults who looked after it.<sup>59</sup> Those sentiments are experience-based.

Nelson maintains that faith is fostered by a community of believers, usually a congregation. The primary role that personal experience plays in a child's religious formation is suggested by Nelson's contention that individuals are the product of their culturing group.<sup>60</sup> Nelson put the congregation forward as the principle society for Christians. For Nelson, both the method by which the congregation communicated and the quality of that communication were inextricably bound to life as lived together in that congregation.<sup>61</sup> The congregation, is the unit with which the believer must work; and

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<sup>58</sup> Groome, 118.

<sup>59</sup> Groome, 119.

<sup>60</sup> C. Ellis Nelson, Where Faith Begins (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1971), 183.

<sup>61</sup> Nelson, 183.

whatever is done or said (or not done and not said) is teaching the members of the group.

There is no neutrality. A failure or refusal to act is instructive and impacting.<sup>62</sup>

While Bushnell advocates the family as the center for socializing the child into Christianity, Nelson seems to be assigning this task to the congregation. Bushnell's theory presupposes the existence of sweet Christian families, families where mother and father understand who they are and what they and their children should be about. Nelson's model would provide the families that Bushnell's model assumes.

In order to realize his vision of the congregation as the primary society and to achieve the goal of faith, Nelson challenges adult believers to be the agents of communication in all types of relationships.<sup>63</sup> He regrets that many adults do not appreciate the need for organized study. According to Nelson, this condition prevails because the religious development of these adults was arrested during their childhood.<sup>64</sup> Thus, educating adults is a primary task for the congregation.<sup>65</sup>

White echoes Nelson's sentiments regarding the need for parents to be educated to properly fulfill their role as caregivers. She regrets that the least systematic effort is given to educating parents, especially mothers, and states that education will never achieve all that it can or should, until the importance of the parents' work is understood more fully,

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<sup>62</sup> Nelson, 184-85.

<sup>63</sup> Nelson, 193.

<sup>64</sup> Nelson, 193.

<sup>65</sup> Nelson, 195.

and parents are trained for this sacred responsibility.<sup>66</sup> White envisions the congregation as an aid to parents in the education of children. The congregation is to be a watchman, jealously guarding the children of the church. She laments the fact that the church is not alert to the critical nature of this obligation. White advocates the establishment of church schools to assist parents in the development of children's character.<sup>67</sup>

Both Nelson and White assign an important role to the congregation in the religious education of children. They provide insights into the question of how religious education can directly impact parents and caregivers, and through them, indirectly facilitate the development of positive God representations by the children under the influence of these caregivers.

Nelson is not prepared to give parents exclusive rights over the religious education of their children. What are his reasons? He opines that it is risky to assume that all parents are Christian and/or that they have the necessary skills to properly train their children. Further, parents, like everybody else, are under judgment and, while fulfilling their role of care-takers, need to have their Christian understanding enlarged and clarified.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Nelson calls for the continual training of adults who are parents. This training, while fostering the parents' spiritual maturation and intellectual growth, will help them do a better job as parents and teachers in their homes.<sup>69</sup> Because they

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<sup>66</sup> White, Child Guidance, 63-64.

<sup>67</sup> White, Child Guidance, 312-13.

<sup>68</sup> Nelson, 209.

<sup>69</sup> Nelson, 209.

serve different purposes, the distinction between the home and the church is not to be blurred. Because homes are such potent forces of socialization, adults must be given help in learning how to function as Christian parents in a home setting.<sup>70</sup> But not all socialization theorists share Nelson's enthusiasm for or confidence in teaching.

John Westerhoff: The Faith Community

John Westerhoff, who served for some time as a Professor of Religion and Education at Duke University Divinity School, complains that the churches have put too much confidence, both in their ability to nurture people to faith and in the art of teaching. He explains why by saying that those who use the schooling-instructional paradigm usually forget that the socialization process is at work and that the "hidden agenda" of socialization is probably more active and productive than the stated instructional agenda.<sup>71</sup> While Westerhoff's point is well-taken, it is difficult to reconcile his heavy emphasis on the value of experience with his critique of nurture.<sup>72</sup> Inasmuch as the force of his work argues in favor of nurture as vigorously as did Bushnell, I am inclined to dismiss his critique of it.

Continuing with Westerhoff, and making another connection to religious education, the one approach to religious education that seems best suited to explore religious formation in terms of socio-cultural processes is the faith community

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<sup>70</sup> Nelson, 210.

<sup>71</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 2, 16-18.

<sup>72</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 63-64.

paradigm.<sup>73</sup> This particular religious education approach seems to capture Bushnell's emphasis on the essential role of the family, Nelson's emphasis on the educational role of the local congregation, and Coe's emphasis on the role of the church in society at large. The faith community is an essential component in the various versions of the socialization/enculturation model that we have reviewed.

John Westerhoff, a proponent of this view, takes to heart the question found in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?" Westerhoff opines that, while Christ will certainly find religion, "he may not find faith."<sup>74</sup> The hope of the second advent of Christ is at the heart of Seventh-day Adventism; in fact it is the heart of Adventism. The assurance that Christ will come again to earth with power and great glory is the foundation upon which this church stands; it is the blessed hope. The hope that propels this dissertation is that Seventh-day Adventist youth will have faith, that when the Lord of Glory returns at the second advent, Christ will find many Adventist youth among the faithful.

Westerhoff says that we are historical actors who are both free and determined, who are shaped while shaping. He rejects the idea of an isolated individual self. We are corporate selves because we have been created to relate with God and each other.<sup>75</sup> He urges that the context of religious education be shifted from educating in schools to

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<sup>73</sup> Jack L. Seymour, Donald E. Miller, et al., Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 19-22.

<sup>74</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 35-36.

educating within a self-conscious community of faith.<sup>76</sup> He calls this a community of faith-enculturation paradigm.<sup>77</sup> This community must be clear about what it believes; its size must allow for meaningful contact with others, and it requires the presence of three generations which embody the faith community's memory, its present, and its vision for the future.<sup>78</sup>

This community of Christian faith can elude us, especially when a community is closed to the presence of a prophet, or when a community tolerates inequity of any sort.<sup>79</sup> Elusive or not, Westerhoff contends that if our children are to have faith, the creation of this faithful community is a must.<sup>80</sup>

Westerhoff details three aspects of corporate life which should be the focus of educational activity: (1) The rituals of that group should be emphasized because their understandings and ways are both sustained by and communicated through the rituals.<sup>81</sup> (2) The experiences people have within the community should be a focal point because "the most significant and fundamental form of learning is experience" and because children will have faith if the life they experience in this community of faith is a distinct

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<sup>76</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 51.

<sup>77</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 50.

<sup>78</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 52-53.

<sup>79</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 54.

<sup>80</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 54.

<sup>81</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 54.

expression of the faith story of the church.<sup>82</sup> (3) The actions performed by the group or its members should be emphasized because these public acts are the proof of our faith.<sup>83</sup>

As envisioned by Westerhoff, the community of faith is called into being to witness, to live its story of God. It is called to social action as a “counter-cultural community of social change.”<sup>84</sup> Echoing the sentiments of Coe, Westerhoff challenges the church to be a servant community with responsibilities in the world and to the world.<sup>85</sup>

Westerhoff wants to shift from an emphasis on behavior to a focus on “the character and quality of life lived together in a community of faith.”<sup>86</sup> He calls for the elimination of all categories that distinguish teacher from student, adult from child, “socializer and socializee.” Thus he chooses the word “enculturation” to embody his view of the educational method to be used in a community of faith.<sup>87</sup>

He shifts the focus away from how the environment, experiences, and the behavior of others impact us, to enculturation which highlights the interactive nature of multi-generational social encounters where no one is seen as an actor nor another as the

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<sup>82</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 63-64.

<sup>83</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 64.

<sup>84</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 71, 66, 69.

<sup>85</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 80.

<sup>87</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 80.



acted upon. Because “religion is caught more than taught,”<sup>88</sup> these multi-generational interactive experiences within the faith community are “the means of Christian education.”<sup>89</sup> The foundation of Westerhoff’s educational program is the faith community composed of “faithing selves,” those who are busy interacting with each other and the larger community. This interaction transmits, sustains, and expands the faith of the “faithing selves” and the community. Thus “faith is an action” which thinks, feels, and wills.<sup>90</sup>

Westerhoff speaks of becoming a Christian in terms of apprenticeships where a person learns by observing, imitating, and practicing what the master does. A person must practice the art of being a Christian. This process of fashioning Christians through practice and experience is called formation.<sup>91</sup>

Another important point of Westerhoff’s concept of enculturation is catechesis. Catechesis is the combination of the processes of formation and education. Westerhoff uses the term formation as a substitute for enculturation or socialization, and he uses catechesis to identify the conscious, intentional aspects of the learning process. He assigns three functions to catechesis: “formation and education for worship; formation

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<sup>88</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 84.

<sup>89</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 80.

<sup>90</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 91.

<sup>91</sup> John H. Westerhoff III, “Fashioning Christians in Our Day,” in Schooling Christians: “Holy Experiments” in American Education, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 271.

and education within worship; education relating worship and daily life.”<sup>92</sup> Westerhoff maintains that participation in the ritual life of the faith community facilitates the formation of the Christian.<sup>93</sup>

Both Westerhoff and White have much to say about parental responsibilities and children’s spiritual development. Westerhoff emphatically declares that parents are not responsible for the way their children turn out. Parents are one of many influences “and even that influence is dulled by what they [children] bring to the interaction.”<sup>94</sup>

Westerhoff explains that relationships within families are complex, where children and parents are mutually impacting each other, where sibling is influencing sibling. Beyond this, parental faithfulness in what is taught to children may not be matched by what is learned by the children; or what is taught by the parents may not be what the children desire. Westerhoff speaks of unintentional consequences of the teaching/learning process, consequences which are sometimes more significant than those intended. He maintains that no person can determine the life of another, not even biologically. Westerhoff insists that even though inheritance and culture play a part in shaping us, “children are responsible for their own lives as are parents for theirs.” He claims that the

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<sup>92</sup> John H. Westerhoff III and Caroline A. Hughes, On the Threshold of God’s Future (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 126-31.

<sup>93</sup> Westerhoff and Hughes, 126.

<sup>94</sup> John H. Westerhoff III, Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins, 1980), 33.

process of socialization within a family is full of mystery, hence, parents ought not to, nor can they, take the credit or the blame for what their children become.<sup>95</sup>

White holds both fathers and mothers responsible for the characters and destiny of their children. She, though not arguing in favor of biological determinism, does insist that there is a biological connection, that parents transmit their mental and physical characteristics along with their dispositions and appetites to their children. Further, she maintains that some children are physically, mentally, and morally weak in consequence of parental intemperance.<sup>96</sup> Beyond the emphasis on biological factors, White opines that parental examples and discipline further determine the characters of children.<sup>97</sup> These differences between White and Westerhoff's views are noteworthy.

Rather than dismissing the differences between the positions taken by White and Westerhoff, I will call upon Horace Bushnell as a third voice so that we can have some further means of critiquing White's position. Bushnell, whose life overlapped White's by thirty years, shares an historical context with her; and, inasmuch as he and Westerhoff espouse the socialization theory of spiritual formation, he shares a theoretical context with Westerhoff. Bushnell compares the character of parents to a river that flowed perpetually down upon their children. He purports that no amount of teaching,

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<sup>95</sup> Westerhoff, Bringing, 33.

<sup>96</sup> White, Story of Patriarchs, 561.

<sup>97</sup> White, "Importance of Home Training" (Testimony 22, 1872), Testimonies, 3:144.

disciplining, or lecturing by parents can “cheat the laws of life and character ordained by God.”<sup>98</sup>

Bushnell, like Westerhoff, notes that parental intentions for children are not always realized. But, unlike Westerhoff, Bushnell says that parental examples are at fault because the examples are more effective than parental instruction. Bushnell asserts that not even the strongest willed child can resist the parental spirit which pervades a home. Hence, children will most likely become like the parents and parents must accept the responsibility for what their children become.<sup>99</sup> Thus we have White and Bushnell holding parents responsible for what their children become and Westerhoff assigning parents an influence on their children, but not a determinative one.

### Conclusion

The personal experience of the child in both the home and the faith community is the thread that runs throughout this chapter. An awareness of the potency of personal experience informed Ellen White’s counsel to parents and church leaders. She did not have access to the insights of psychology, psycho-analysis, sociology, anthropology, nor religious education theories, yet she emphatically maintained that parental influence on children was overwhelmingly important and she was unvarying in her avowal that “children are what their parents make them by their instruction, discipline, and example.”<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, she did not free the congregation from responsibility for the

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<sup>98</sup> Bushnell, 118.

<sup>99</sup> Bushnell, 117-18.

<sup>100</sup> White, “Parental Training” (Testimony 31, 1882), Testimonies, 5:37.

education of its children. In agreement with the socialization theorists, she saw this as a co-operative effort of a faith community composed of home, school, and church.

Putting White in dialogue with Bushnell, Coe, Nelson, and Westerhoff reveals points of convergence and divergence. They all agree that parental influences on children are critical. Coe and Westerhoff present schemes in which religious education can provide support for caregivers by creating a faith community that would foster the education and formation of both parents and children. Bushnell, Nelson, and White call for intentional instruction to be given to parents and prospective parents so that children can be nurtured from conception and instructed properly as they develop within a faith community. Within this setting, White is one voice among several. Her position has been clarified and given a contemporary context through this dialogue with socialization/enculturation theorists. Enduring principles from White's Testimonies have been clarified and expanded. The next task is to appropriate White's enduring teachings regarding children's spiritual development and to explain how the dialogical hermeneutic provides a means of re-engaging Adventist youth with White's writings.

## CHAPTER 6

### Schooling Adventists: Putting the Pieces Together

The earlier chapters of this dissertation reveal several enduring principles from the Testimonies of White that could be advantageously appropriated in this chapter. One of those principles regarding the importance of reading her in context will be appropriated in presenting a satisfying approach to her Testimonies. Principles related to the spiritual development of children will be used in explicating White's goal for Adventist education. By appropriating these principles, the final step in the dialogical hermeneutic will be illustrated.

This chapter begins by assessing the factors that led to the present disengagement from White's writings and illustrates that while White resisted an inflexible interpretation and use of her Testimonies, they were, nonetheless, used in that fashion by many well-meaning Adventists. The chapter ends by showing how Adventist youth can be re-engaged with the Testimonies of White through meaningful interaction between her writings and their personal experiences.

### Assessing the Current State of Adventist Education

The dissertation addresses a problem identified by Valuegenesis. Valuegenesis is a research project conducted by the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It focuses on the faith, values, and commitments of Adventist youth in grades six through twelve. More than 12,000 youth, 1,900 parents, and 700 pastors, teachers, and principals from the Adventist church in North America participated in the project. Valuegenesis takes a close look at Adventist families, congregations, and

schools (the major institutions responsible for educating youth) and identifies the dynamics within each of them that tend to promote faith maturity, Christian values, and loyalty to Adventism among the youth of the church. Valuegenesis provides a comprehensive view of Adventist youth as it documents and evaluates the condition of several factors: their faith, values, loyalty to Adventism, and the impact of these on their behavior.<sup>1</sup>

One problem, as identified by Valuegenesis, is that Adventist youth are confused about the church's teachings regarding Ellen White, hence they are not inclined to read her Testimonies. Inasmuch as White and the Testimonies she gave to the church played such a formative role in founding the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in maintaining its sense of identity, the disengagement from her Testimonies by a generation of Adventist youth would likely translate into declining loyalty to the church and precipitate an identity crisis for the church. Therefore, the church needs to develop new ways to interpret the Testimonies and to communicate an honest, defensible, and positive view of White's life and ministry to Adventist youth.

The 4,763 elementary schools, 939 secondary schools, and 81 colleges and universities the Seventh-day Adventist Church operates around the globe indicates a strong commitment to education.<sup>2</sup> Even so, some members are disappointed with Adventist education because the schools seem unable to correct "what is happening in

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<sup>1</sup> Benson and Donahue, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Johnsson, 51.

Adventist homes and churches.”<sup>3</sup> Still other members, parents and grandparents, are in pain because they invested heavily in Adventist education only to see their children graduate from Adventist academies and colleges with no love for God or the church.<sup>4</sup> William Johnsson admits that though the number of young people lost to the church is staggering, it would be wrong to put all the blame on the schools.<sup>5</sup>

Johnsson presents an incisive assessment of Adventist education. He maintains that the Adventist experiment with education has produced the following results: a membership that is better educated than the population around them; a wider gap between Adventists who are well educated and those who are not; a greater disparity between Adventists in the West and those from developing countries; a greater variety of persons within the church; and “increasing fragmentation.”<sup>6</sup>

Johnsson contends that education, by its very nature, is risky. He explains how Ellen White challenged the Adventist Church to teach its students how to think for themselves and not simply to reflect other people’s thoughts.<sup>7</sup> Johnsson opines that the church succeeded in this task to the degree that our young people are now using their critical skills to test the church’s arguments for lifestyle practices and its use of Scripture,

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<sup>3</sup> Johnsson, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Johnsson, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Johnsson, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Johnsson, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Johnsson, 52-53. Thus, it is obvious that White repudiated the banking concept of education.



and they are coming to conclusions that differ from those of the church.<sup>8</sup> The present generation of Adventist youth are not inclined to accept denominational pronouncements based on a reading of Scripture or the Testimonies that claims they are inerrant or verbally inspired. This development explains why one segment of today's Adventist youth are having problems accepting both the denomination's use of Scripture and the Testimonies of White. This is one of the reasons why many Adventist youth are either uncertain about their continued affiliation with the church or have already left. This crisis has been in the making for almost a century.

Near the turn of the century, several Adventist leaders, particularly Professor W. W. Prescott, President of the denomination's Battle Creek College, and Pastor Stephen N. Haskell caused serious problems within the denomination by their emphasis on verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility for both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White.<sup>9</sup> W. C. White, Ellen White's son, reports that Prescott had probably been influenced by Francois Gaussen (1790-1863), a Swiss clergyman who insisted that the Bible was verbally inspired. He also reports that this emphasis on the verbal inspiration of the Bible was a new development among Adventists. W. C. White writes that neither his father, James White, nor Joseph Bates, J. N. Andrews, or Uriah Smith ever subscribed to this view. W. C. White maintains that his mother never accepted the theory that the Bible, or her own writings were verbally inspired. He questions whether his mother would have so

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<sup>8</sup> Johnsson, 53.

<sup>9</sup> W. C. White, "Letter to L. E. Froom" (8 Jan. 1928), Selected Messages, 3:453-55.

often and openly revised, edited, and modified her Testimonies if she considered them to be verbally inspired.<sup>10</sup>

Leaders like A. G. Daniells and W. C. White joined Ellen White in resisting this rigid view of the Bible and her writings; they, in turn, pressed for a reasonable view of inspiration.<sup>11</sup> George Knight reports that A. T. Jones also supported the view that the Bible and the writings of Ellen White were verbally inspired and that Jones found her flexibility on inspiration more than he could tolerate, hence he rejected White.<sup>12</sup>

After White died in 1915, “the careful balance taught by the Whites and Daniells was destroyed by the force and magnitude of the struggles in American Protestantism during the 1920s.”<sup>13</sup> Fundamentalists and liberals polarized on the issues of verbal inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy. Adventism, caught up in this debate, “lost its balanced position” so completely that the General Conference sponsored a college textbook which not only denied that Ellen White had ever advocated thought inspiration, but also proclaimed infallibility and maintained that every word was inspired.<sup>14</sup> Thenceforth, according to George Knight, attempts to interpret the Bible or the

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<sup>10</sup> W. C. White, “A Statement Made by W. C. White Before the General Conference Council, October 30, 1911,” Selected Messages, 3:437-39); and “Letter to L. E. Froom” (8 Jan. 1928), Selected Messages, 3:454-55.

<sup>11</sup> Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 107.

<sup>12</sup> Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 107.

<sup>13</sup> Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 107

<sup>14</sup> Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 107.

Testimonies of White have been a lucrative source of extremism, argument, and dissension; even to this day.<sup>15</sup>

The college textbook that Knight mentions is a factor in this discussion. That book, and the mind-set that it represents, were an irresistible force in favor of a legalistic hermeneutic of interpretation and of lifestyle. The Adventist students who matriculated under this cloud certainly were not likely to think their own thoughts nor to make up their own minds as Ellen White had advocated.

White's philosophy for education, especially higher education, is that all people are created in God's image and endowed with individuality, the power to think and to decide; therefore, true education should aim to develop this power by training students to be thinkers, "and not mere reflectors of other men's thought."<sup>16</sup>

If it is true that "on the whole, youth reflect their parents,"<sup>17</sup> then most Adventist youth of the 1920s through 1950s became reflectors of the thoughts and spirit of their parents and teachers. The banking concept of education, in which the knowledgeable bestow knowledge as a gift upon those whom they consider to know nothing, was alive

<sup>15</sup> Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 107.

<sup>16</sup> White, Education, 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> V. Bailey Gillespie, forward to Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance, by Roger L. Dudley and V. Bailey Gillespie (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992), xii. Gillespie was speaking most specifically of today's youth. However, I believe the principle behind his statement allows for its use in another time setting. The fact that today's Adventist youth are questioning the value of the Testimonies and are unclear about the church's teachings on Ellen White simply reflect the facts the adult church members, and many ministers are also asking the same questions. Dudley and Gillespie, 274.

and well within Adventism in spite of White's counsel to the contrary.<sup>18</sup> Such students were not equipped to critique the church's use of the Bible or the Testimonies of White. White's passionate plea in favor of true education had not yet been realized.<sup>19</sup>

The youth of the 1960s and onward began to challenge the banking concept of education. Martin Weber, an Adventist pastor and author, writes about his days in elementary and secondary schools run by the denomination. He alleges that, back in the 1960s, it was rare for an Adventist student to experience compassion from a church school teacher. He reports that some teachers seemed not to understand the youth at all. Trivial acts of mischief were treated as rebellion against God. These students received almost daily doses of guilt; they were told that only perfect children would go to heaven. Teachers and preachers reminded these students that time was running out for them to get good enough to survive the trials ahead.<sup>20</sup>

Adventist high school students of the 1960s were early Baby Boomers. How did they respond to the Adventist brand of what Alice Miller called "poisonous pedagogy?" In her book, For Your Own Good, Miller decries all adult behaviors that abuse and demean children. She refers to the measures that are aimed at maintaining adult control of and power over children as "poisonous pedagogy."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This idea reflects the thinking of Paulo Freire. Freire, 53.

<sup>19</sup> White, Education, 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Weber, More Adventist Hot Potatoes (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1992), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Miller reminds her readers that children, especially smaller ones, need adults who empathize with them and not adults who try to control them. Miller wonders if a small child would ever think that "the need for thunder and lightening" arose from deep

Johnsson notes that “all denominations suffered heavy losses of members among the Baby Boomers. This generation turned its back on many of the values of their elders.”<sup>22</sup> Long-standing traditions were not right just because they were old. Everything eventually came under question. Johnsson pointed out that the Adventist church has done poorly in holding or attracting Baby Boomers; in fact, he admits that our losses from the Boomer generation are “horrendous;” and mores the pity because “many congregations seem unwilling to admit the problem or to make the effort to welcome and accommodate the needs of this group.”<sup>23</sup>

Wade Clark Roof, Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, and William McKinney, Director of Educational Programs and Professor of Religion and Sociology at Hartford Seminary, report that “something happened” during the 1960s that seriously weakened the pressures of religious conformity.<sup>24</sup> They assert that the late 1960s and 1970s witnessed an unparalleled defection from the churches of America; so great were the defections and experimentations with alternative spiritual experiences that

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within the unconscious region of the adult psyche and had nothing to do with its own psychic landscape. She alleges that the use adults make of certain Biblical quotations like ‘For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth,’ implies that the adults share God’s omnipotence, and inasmuch as a pious person is not to question God’s motives, hence a child is to submit to adults without asking for explanations. In Miller’s thinking, this is wrong. Miller, For Your Own Good, 6, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Johnsson, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Johnsson, 46. Johnsson adds that this problem “is largely confined to the white Adventist community” of North America because Blacks and Hispanics have been far more successful in ministering to Boomers (pp. 46-47).

<sup>24</sup> Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 14.

they call it a revolt against the major faiths. A goodly portion of those leaving the established churches and faiths were well-educated middle class youth.<sup>25</sup> Roof and McKinney report that the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church actually increased within this same time frame.<sup>26</sup> These scholars must have looked at the front door of the Adventist church only. Had they looked, they would have seen the back door wide open while those “horrendous” numbers Johnsson mentioned were pouring out!

Roof and McKinney discovered that “many young, well-educated persons of middle-class background” rebelled against old authorities as old values, like conformity, lost their ability to inspire.<sup>27</sup> They claim that church members became less inclined to ask how they might serve their churches and began to ask how the churches might serve their personal needs. Those church members demanded personal space, space in which “to examine their beliefs and outlooks from the standpoint of their psychic needs.”<sup>28</sup>

Roof and McKinney admit that those same themes are still alive and manifest themselves in two particular, yet related, areas (areas that are significant to this dissertation): “decline of religious authority” and “weakened attachment to organized religion.”<sup>29</sup> They note that the erosion of respect for traditional channels of authority,

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<sup>25</sup> Roof and McKinney, 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Roof and McKinney, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Roof and McKinney, 25, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Roof and McKinney, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Roof and McKinney, 50.

including papal infallibility and Biblical inerrancy, had been going on for years, but accelerated markedly in the 1960s.<sup>30</sup>

In so many ways, the Adventist church reflects the trends in America at large. Adventist Boomers were much like other American Boomers. Even though many Adventist Boomers left the church, many of them came back as they began to raise families; other Boomers never left because they had bought into the legalistic mind-set. The youth, who are now disengaged from White and disengaging from the church, are the children of the Baby Boomers.

As we have two groups of Boomers, so do we have two groups of youth who are having problems with White's Testimonies and allegiance to the church: (1) the youth whose Boomer parents never left the church; who were subjected to the same heavy-handed, legalistic, behavior-oriented upbringing their parents experienced, and hence reject White's Testimonies as irrelevant; (2) the youth whose Boomer parents long ago repudiated White's Testimonies and the denomination's Biblical defense of certain lifestyle practices and never introduced their children to White's Testimonies.

Johnsson claims there are Adventist parents and grandparents in America who are still trying to discover what they did or did not do that caused their children to leave the church.<sup>31</sup> Are these parents and grandparents likely to be the Boomers that Weber mentioned who reflected their parents' legalistic tendencies?

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<sup>30</sup> Roof and McKinney, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Johnsson, 52.

Alice Miller would urge the church to examine its current classroom pedagogy.

Martin Weber did that. Weber was raised as an Adventist, attended Adventist schools through his college years, and has served the church as a pastor. He writes out of his passion to see his church come to grips with the touchy issues facing it. He reports that much of the legalism of the past has been exorcised from the Bible class textbooks; the teachers are “generally less harsh and more sensitive;” emotional growth and relationships are fostered at school. Weber notes that the restricting legalism of the past has yielded to “laxity and liberalism.”<sup>32</sup> He raises several questions regarding Adventist teachers of today and how they were impacted by the spirit of the 1960s.

Many of today’s teachers are from my generation [Weber’s 1960s school days], burned out from the rigors of an unpleasant and unloving religious upbringing. Having escaped the bondage of fanaticism, are they now wandering in the spacious but barren desert of secularism? Whatever the reason for the lack of spirituality among many of our teachers, we cannot deny that our schools need a revival of genuine godliness just as much now as in the old days of suffocating legalism.<sup>33</sup>

Many of the Adventist Boomer parents who continued the legalistic tradition are still searching for answers as to why their children left the church. These Boomers still claim to love their church, but few have the love and respect of their children. Many of the Adventist Boomer parents who repudiated the legalistic legacy have the love of their children; but neither parents nor children have much love for the church, or for God. Could these factors be part of the reason that there is an obvious “erosion of faith

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<sup>32</sup> Weber, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Weber, 18.



commitment on the part of our members and their children?”<sup>34</sup> Is the current disengagement from the writings of Ellen White a consequence of the trends that Roof and McKinney describe where respect for traditional channels of authority is eroding? Are Adventist youth mirroring their counterparts in other communities questioning the inerrancy of the Bible and the Testimonies and by disengaging from White? Can we find a way to remedy this disengagement?

The mid-1980s found many leaders of Adventist education discouraged and perplexed as to what to do. They sensed a need to set new goals and to re-establish a sense of mission for Adventist education.<sup>35</sup> While working on the new set of goals and a new mission statement, the Adventist church commissioned the Seltzer-Daley Company to survey North American Adventists regarding their attitudes towards Adventist education. The study revealed that Adventists still considers Adventist education as: essential to the mission of the church and the salvation of our children; “the key to the future survival of the church;” and the means by which to prepare workers for the church. The people still endorse the educational goals laid down by White.<sup>36</sup> But can the people, especially the Boomers and their children, be re-engaged with the Testimonies of White? If the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to survive in North America, re-engagement is

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<sup>34</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 10-11.

crucial. In order to provide a satisfying approach to White's Testimonies, it is necessary to appropriate her own enduring principles regarding their proper use.

### A Satisfying Approach to the Testimonies of Ellen White

Something that George Albert Coe wrote in 1929 in "What is Christian Education?" provides a possible explanation of what happened to White's Testimonies, and may also explain what happened within the Seventh-day Adventist church and its educational system—education in the home, within the congregation, and in the school classroom. Coe's observations furnish a setting in which to cast and evaluate White's enduring principles regarding the use of her Testimonies.

Coe asserts that education is destined to be both transmission from the past and a response to the present; we are powerless to prevent this from happening. However, we can choose which of the two will be the primary focus. Thus, Coe sets a practical dilemma for the Christian teacher: Shall the primary purpose of Christian education be to hand on a religion, or to create a new world?<sup>37</sup> In the aftermath of the 1888 General Conference, the leaders of the Adventist church and many members showed by their actions that they were committed to preserving the "landmarks." The church chose to hand on a religion that was riddled with legalism. The church, by making that choice also chose to ignore the Testimonies of Ellen White which warned of the dangers of legalism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> George Albert Coe, "What Is Christian Education?: The Starting Point of a Solution," in A Reader in Christian Education: Foundations and Basic Perspectives, ed. Eugene S. Gibbs (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 248.

<sup>38</sup> Moore, 81-82; and Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 106-07.

Coe takes us even further in understanding why today's Adventist youth are confused about White's role in the church and what measure of credibility to assign to her Testimonies. Coe insists that all schools, whether run by the church or the government, are committed to perpetuating the existing culture.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the Adventist church, after 1888, had an unofficial policy to maintain and transmit a particular type of religion. Westerhoff would call it a hidden curriculum.

Coe's comment is clear that schools do not transmit cultures (or confessional life styles) whole and unchanged. Yet, his statement helps to demonstrate that the Adventist church was guilty of using the schooling instructional paradigm (as described by Westerhoff) to protect the "landmarks," to hold off change. The tension within Coe's statement exposes what happened within the Adventist church one hundred years ago.

Coe explains that teachers do not teach all that they know. Literature teachers select examples according to their particular tastes, not according to the taste of previous generations. Coe continues by explaining how history teachers must decide which events, movements, persons and the like will be in the foreground and which ones will be in the background. Choices are made to include and exclude particular facts from the past. Not all of the facts of history are set before the students.<sup>40</sup> He indicates that this same rule operates when morals are being taught. Coe cuts deeply when he alleges that "we never tell the young the whole truth about the conduct of the present adult

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<sup>39</sup> Coe, "What is Christian Education?," 252.

<sup>40</sup> Coe, "What is Christian Education?," 252.

generation, nor about the standards that it in practice accepts.”<sup>41</sup> Whether the aim of education is the creation of a new world or the transmission of a stagnating religion, adults are quite selective about how much of the funded capital to let the students handle, the adults exercise a “discreet silence concerning parts of our civilization.”<sup>42</sup>

Reflecting Coe’s model, the Seventh-day Adventist Church selected what points to reveal or not to reveal to subsequent generations of church members regarding the 1888 confrontation over the subject of “righteousness by faith.” The church was highly selective in what it said or did not say to the membership regarding the position that Ellen White had taken on the subject of the verbal inspiration of the Bible and her writings. By publishing the college textbook which denied White’s position of thought inspiration, the church was practicing Coe’s “discreet silence.”

When selective silence is matched by selective disclosures you create a pedagogical technique that is destined to domesticate the most aggressive will and inquiring intellect. Myths grow quickly in such an environment. In the years since 1888, Adventist have witnessed the rise of the myth of the “inflexible prophet.”<sup>43</sup> Years ago, White complained about the tendency to view her Testimonies in a legalistic, inflexible manner.

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<sup>41</sup> Coe, “What is Christian Education?,” 252.

<sup>42</sup> Coe, “What is Christian Education?,” 252.

<sup>43</sup> George R. Knight, Myths in Adventism: An Interpretive Study of Ellen White, Education, and Related Issues (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 17.

She spoke of some people who were inclined to “deceptive misrepresentations” of her Testimonies. She accused these people of using false reasoning and twisting and turning the Testimonies to vindicate their personal positions.<sup>44</sup> White called attention to certain ministers who caused the Testimonies to be despised by their injudicious use of them. She said that these pastors made the Testimonies an iron rule for others and that they took the extreme meaning of the Testimonies and pushed them so hard that church members lost faith in the Testimonies.<sup>45</sup> White said that there were others who tried to strengthen their own personal positions on certain subjects by selecting and exaggerating statements from the Testimonies which they thought would support their views while at the same time ignoring Testimonies which opposed their views.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of her warning, the trend continued and the myth was created. George Knight reports that this myth “views Ellen White as an unbending interpreter of her own writings and implies that her true followers will be just as inflexible and rigid as she in their application of the ‘straight testimony.’”<sup>47</sup> This myth of the “inflexible prophet” has played a major part in bringing us to the current youth disengagement from White and declining loyalty to the denomination.

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<sup>44</sup> Ellen G. White, “Correct Views Concerning the Testimonies: A Reply to an Inquirer,” Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 6 Sept. 1906, 7.

<sup>45</sup> White, “Wrong Use of the ‘Testimonies’” (Testimony 33, 1889), Testimonies, 5:669-70.

<sup>46</sup> White, “An Unwarranted Distinction” (Testimony 33, 1889), Testimonies, 5:688.

<sup>47</sup> Knight, Myths, 17.

Coe provides a clue as to how myths develop. He charges that state run schools do not reveal the whole truth about the blunders our government has made; he explains how the process of selecting what to reveal and what to conceal actually transforms the shape of the present and reshapes the past in telling only portions of its story.<sup>48</sup> Incomplete stories are made complete by active minds. Myths develop in this context. According to Coe, this situation is pitiable because no church run school system presents “an impartially realistic picture of the state of our religion,” because no church is so holy that it gives a full self-revelation. Thus, says Coe, when God, in the form of children, looks into our ecclesiastical gardens, “every denomination resorts to fig leaves.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, when today’s Adventist youth look into the garden of Adventist history, they are confused by what they see. They are confused about the church’s teachings concerning White and her Testimonies. They wonder why the truth about White is shrouded in mystery, covered with Coe’s fig leaves.

However, few educational or denominational leaders will acknowledge that this selective process is a reality. They are reluctant to admit that our denomination used the Testimonies of White as a divinely ordained fig leaf to cover its naked advocacy of inerrancy, literalism, and legalism. They seem hesitant to concede that the church, in order to legitimize its rejection of A. T. Jones and J. H. Waggoner’s message of righteousness by faith in favor of a works-oriented approach to salvation, made heavy use

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<sup>48</sup> Coe, “What is Christian Education?,” 252.

<sup>49</sup> Coe, “What is Christian Education?,” 252.

of White's Testimonies to "prove" its point. Thus the proof-texting approach was confirmed within our ranks.

White was never an inflexible, legalistically-minded prophet. She reminded the church that she had been commissioned to place general principles before the people, while, at the same time, she might have to deliver specific and cutting messages to individuals if directed to do so by God.<sup>50</sup> She spent years placing principles before the people and begging ministers not to interpret the Testimonies in such a way as to turn the people from them.<sup>51</sup>

White cautioned church members to be careful how they constructed arguments in defense of fundamental articles of faith. She put forward a principle which I believe applies to her writings as well as to the Bible. She instructed them to avoid using arguments that are not truly sound. Such arguments may silence the opposition for the time being, but they will dishonor the truth in the long term. Any argument advanced should be strong enough to stand the most exacting scrutiny. White was afraid that many Adventists had become so accustomed to trying to win debates that they were guilty of not properly interpreting and using Biblical texts.<sup>52</sup>

White urged Adventists not to use her Testimonies to support or defend their beliefs when talking with "unbelievers." She advised church members to use the Bible to

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<sup>50</sup> White, "Personal Testimonies" (Testimony 33, 1889), Testimonies, 5:660.

<sup>51</sup> White, "An Unwarranted Distinction" (Testimony 33, 1889), 5:691.

<sup>52</sup> White, "The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration" (Testimony 33, 1889), Testimonies, 5:708.

support doctrines and beliefs since using the Testimonies to prove a point to non-Adventists would be counter productive as these people had no reason to accept her messages as inspired.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps I should follow the counsel that White gave in 1901 and let her speak for herself. She wrote,

I know that many men take the testimonies the Lord has given, and apply them as they suppose they should be applied, picking out a sentence here and there, taking it from its proper connection, and applying it according to their idea. Thus poor souls become bewildered, when could they read in order all that has been given, they would see the true application, and would not become confused. Much that purports to be a message from Sister White, serves the purpose of misrepresenting Sister White, making her testify in favor of things that are not in accordance with her mind or judgment. This makes her work very trying. Reports fly from one to another regarding what Sister White has said. Each time the report is repeated, it grows larger. If Sister White has anything to say, leave her to say it. No one is called upon to be a mouth piece for Sister White....Please let Sister White bear her own message. It will come with a better grace from her than from the one who reports her.<sup>54</sup>

White saw the dangers associated with picking and choosing statements (proof-texting) from her Testimonies to suit the user. It was this legalistic use of her writings that she tried to prevent. In spite of cogent appeals, church workers and leaders allowed her to become, in the minds of future generations of church members, an inflexible prophet. This mindset allowed the impression that White actually endorsed the repudiation of Jones and Waggoner's message at Minneapolis in 1888.

After the 1888 General Conference session, White told the membership of the church that it did not need to fear the opposition of the world. The enemy was already at

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<sup>53</sup> White, "Parental Responsibility" (Testimony 1, 1855), Testimonies, 1:119-20.

<sup>54</sup> White, "Manuscript 21, 1901," Selected Messages, 1:44-45.



work from within. She explained to the membership that “the influence that grew out of the resistance to light and truth at Minneapolis tended to make of no effect the light that God had given to His people through the Testimonies.”<sup>55</sup> Her appeals for the leaders to “let the law take care of itself” and for the people to “trust in the merits of Jesus”<sup>56</sup> went unanswered. For a long time the church was successful in hiding behind the fig leaf of the Testimonies, the same Testimonies that denounced the legalistic spirit that prevailed for so long in Adventist history.

Thus, the youth have good reason to be disengaged from the Testimonies of White and confused about the denomination’s position regarding her. Even many adults are struggling to understand how so precious a gift as the Testimonies could have been abused so deliberately. It will take some time to fully understand what happened and all of the reasons why.

White, while living, resisted the tendency to use her Testimonies in a proof-texting fashion. She could only hope that after her death the church would be responsible in its use of her writings. It was not to be. However, White ought not be held responsible for the image of herself as an inflexible prophet; she ought not be held responsible for the way in which her Testimonies have been abused.<sup>57</sup> As Alice Miller’s case studies demonstrate the potent consequence associated with abusing children, so the Adventist

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<sup>55</sup> Ellen G. White quoted in A. Leroy Moore, Adventism in Conflict, 81.

<sup>56</sup> Knight, Anticipating the Advent, 75-76.

<sup>57</sup> A Leroy Moore maintains that White did not have a legalistic bias and that the problem is with those who use her Testimonies. Moore, 127.

church is itself a case study revealing the potent consequences of institutionalized abuse of divine revelation. Many Adventist children do not have faith because the church has not always been a faithful steward of revelation, because the church has abused its power over its members, because so many adults have internalized the legalistic image of God presented by the church, and because adults have exercised the same power over children and given them a legalistic image of God. In short, Adventist children do not have faith because Adventist adults have not lived with them in faithful ways.

White's plea to speak for herself is still valid. Her insistence that she could represent herself more graciously than those who delighted in reporting what she said has been proven correct. The church can use her Testimonies responsibly by applying a hermeneutic that is true to what she intended.

#### White's Goal for Adventist Education

In Chapter 5, White called for the home, the church, and the school to work together for the spiritual well-being of children. The goal of that cooperation was to lead children to Christ. The critical need for warm, loving, and godly adult examples was demonstrated. Westerhoff maintains that it is useless to expect innovations in education to save us until such time as the adults among us are "knowledgeable in their faith," know what it means to be transformed by the power of the gospel, and are willing to live in the way that Jesus' disciples did.<sup>58</sup> When John Westerhoff charges that "the challenge facing

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<sup>58</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 85.

the church is the bland, unconverted lives of its members,”<sup>59</sup> he is not speaking to Adventists; yet he actually identifies a central issue that contributes to the current disengagement from the Testimonies of White. The issue is conversion.

White identifies true or genuine conversion as the number one need of most professed Christians and as the number one need of the Adventist church.<sup>60</sup> She counseled the editors of the Advent Review to avoid printing articles that would stir up controversy and to concentrate on the need of the people to seek true conversion of their hearts.<sup>61</sup> White stated that Adventist ministers need to be taught to spend more of their time and energies explaining true conversion to church members because all Adventists need to understand clearly that it is impossible for humans to earn salvation by being good, because salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone.<sup>62</sup>

As we note White’s advice to avoid controversial doctrinal issues in favor of dealing with conversion (the real need), we have before us two streams of advice that White had been giving prior to 1888, and continued to give afterwards, that are at the heart of the present disengagement from her Testimonies. If church leaders and members

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<sup>59</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 85.

<sup>60</sup> Ellen G. White, “Almost to the Excellence of the Angels,” in Our High Calling, compiled by the Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1961), 218; and “An Appeal for Self-Sacrificing Effort,” Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 16 September 1909, 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Arthur White, 249.

<sup>62</sup> Ellen G. White, “Manuscript 36” (1890), in Faith and Works, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), 19.

at the center of the 1888 debate over righteousness by faith had been truly converted and in tune with God's will, the debate over this doctrine may not have become so acrimonious, White's inspired support of the emphasis on salvation through faith may not have been scorned by the leadership of the church, the church may not have continued in its legalistic emphasis of salvation through human obedience to God's laws, and the church may not have been so inclined to adopt the verbally inspired, inerrant view of scripture and the Testimonies of White. It was the use of this view that led us into the current situation, a situation which could have been avoided if White's call to true conversion had been heeded. Thus, Westerhoff's reference to the bland, unconverted lives of Christians speaks to our current plight, as well as to White's goal for Adventist education.

According to White, what is the primary aim for Adventist education? The all-important thing is the conversion of students.<sup>63</sup> Everything else, however commendable, is secondary.<sup>64</sup> Knight opines that if the goals of character development and /or preparation for service are sought for outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ, they are probably just another attempt "at salvation by works."<sup>65</sup>

White insists that the teachers' failure to do thorough work in religious education is directly related to their lack of a conversion experience. She accuses the teachers of

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<sup>63</sup> White, Fundamentals, 436.

<sup>64</sup> Knight, Myths, 48.

<sup>65</sup> Knight, Myths, 48.

not allowing the students access to what they themselves have no desire to experience: the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. White characterizes the teachers' resistance to the movement of the Holy Spirit as bordering on blasphemy.<sup>66</sup>

It is here that the cogency of Westerhoff's statement comes into clear focus. His insistence that the unconverted lives of adults is the major challenge facing the church seems to come directly from the Testimonies of White who suggests that Adventist students and teachers need heart conversion, that students and teachers need to learn how to recognize the voice of the Shepherd. White notes that teachers need a genuine change in both their thoughts and methods so that they may be able to have a personal relationship with Christ and do a proper job.<sup>67</sup> It is important to remember that when White speaks of teachers, she includes parents, church workers, and classroom instructors.

Adventists need to know that prophets are called forth to remind people that God's vision places radical demands on their lives,<sup>68</sup> demands unlike the soul crushing ones of legalism, demands which God says are easy and light.<sup>69</sup> From time to time "individuals catch a glimpse of God's vision and commit their lives to its realization; yet

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<sup>66</sup> White, Fundamentals, 434.

<sup>67</sup> White, Fundamentals, 435.

<sup>68</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 70-71.

<sup>69</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30, NIV.).

that vision still remains a lost dream.”<sup>70</sup> Ellen White’s vision for Adventist education is still a partially lost dream. Shall we hold her responsible for what others have done?

Ellen White reminds Seventh-day Adventists that “we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”<sup>71</sup> These words are generally accepted by the church as words of comfort and courage; especially when the emphasis is put on “nothing to fear.” This dissertation calls attention to “except as we shall forget,” for it seems that some Adventists have forgotten the crucial role White played in guiding early Adventists out of the fanaticism that followed the Disappointment of 1844, and how those same Adventists accepted her visions as a token of God’s favor and guidance.

Thus, we revisit Coe’s mention of decisions which we must make regarding the past and present. A person must know before they can forget. Many youth in our church do not know how God led us, nor do they know God’s teaching in our history. White tried to alert the church to the fact that education needs to be grounded in time, that the church needs to pay attention to time. White’s statement indicates that she understood time in the way that Professor Thomas Groome presents it—the past, present, and future in a dialectic relationship. Great care should be taken so that no one of the three is emphasized at the expense of the other two. Groome believes that when we place too much emphasis on students’ present experiences and interests, we may forget the gifts of

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<sup>70</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 70.

<sup>71</sup> White, Life Sketches, 196.

the past or may deal irresponsibly with the future, or both. Such a course of action would make the present a prisoner of itself (along with the people within it), “captured in an ahistorical cage of ‘now,’ deprived of its past and disowning its future.”<sup>72</sup> When the past (historical tradition) dominates, then the emphasis tends to be on what is (what is already known) and little time is spent on what could be or what ought to be.<sup>73</sup>

The denomination erred in clinging to the past and using the educational system to perpetuate a legalistic view of the Gospel, a legalistic hermeneutic of scripture and the Testimonies, and teaching religion at the expense of personal faith. If the youth are to be re-engaged with White’s Testimonies, a hermeneutic that encourages personal investigation of them and interaction with them must be employed. Faith in scripture and the Testimonies results from personal encounters with them. Adventist youth need to be taught how to study and correctly interpret both. They must be given the freedom to investigate and to ask questions. Conversion must be the result of their personal convictions. Adventist youth need to see genuine conversion in the lives of the adults who work with them, and experience it for themselves as well. The enduring principle to be appropriated here is that everyone who works with children need first to be converted themselves, so that they can lead children to have a similar experience.

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<sup>72</sup> Groome, 5-9.

<sup>73</sup> Groome, 7, 9.

### Re-engaging Adventist Youth

The purpose of this dialogue between White, Rizzuto, Miller, and other theorists is to provide a new way of approaching White and engaging Adventist youth with her Testimonies. The question may be asked: Why was this dialogical approach chosen? Why not deal with this matter from a theological angle? Why not argue in favor of authority based on revelation? This approach was chosen because those routes are currently impassable within Adventism as a result of the polarization of Adventist scholars and laity over the role of law-keeping versus righteousness by faith.

White spoke to this issue back in 1890. She stated that the prejudices and opinions that prevailed at Minneapolis were still alive. She wrote,

The tops have been cut down, but the roots have never been eradicated, and they still bear their unholy fruit *to poison the judgment, pervert the perceptions, and blind the understanding of those with whom you connect* [emphasis added], in regard to the message and the messengers.<sup>74</sup>

Thus it seems that White anticipated the current impasse, yet could not prevent it from becoming a reality. She urged leaders and members to stop using her Testimonies in a proof-texting fashion to support certain opinions while ignoring counsel which condemned other positions. She was grieved by the fact that Adventist ministers continued a blind warfare, turning their weapons upon each other, and publicly presenting

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<sup>74</sup> Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, compiled by Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications (1923; reprint, Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962), 467; and White, "Ellen G. White Reports on the Minneapolis Conference," Selected Messages, 3:161.



opposite opinions with no prior effort to harmonize their views.<sup>75</sup> The condition that prevailed in the 1890s continues in the 1990s.

Let me expand. William G. Johnsson admits that the potential for the fragmentation of Adventism is real, that the Adventist community is full of many voices, teachers, papers, and videos presenting diverse opinions on a host of topics. Even so, he considers the presence and effect of these diverse voices and influences to be “Good--so long as.”<sup>76</sup> Johnsson qualifies his optimism. First, this diversity of opinions is tolerable, and maybe healthy and helpful, “so long as we search and decide for ourselves.”<sup>77</sup> However, the church is not always comfortable with members who search and decide for themselves. This is a major contributor to the current disengagement of the youth; they want to discover and confirm truth for themselves. The schooling-instructional paradigm which prevailed for so long makes it difficult for church members to search for God’s will with open hearts and minds. Too often their minds have been made up for them. By Johnsson’s own measure, the diversity of voices, teachers, papers, and videos is not now good.

Second, according to Johnsson, this diversity could be good “so long as we follow the quest for truth through the Holy Spirit, not through a human agency.”<sup>78</sup> Johnsson’s optimism is laudable; yet, its realization is open to question. Adventist history reveals

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<sup>75</sup> White, “Put Away Differences,” Manuscript Releases, 15: 298.

<sup>76</sup> Johnsson, 94-95.

<sup>77</sup> Johnsson, 94-95.

<sup>78</sup> Johnsson, 94-95.

how some denominational leaders resisted the Holy Spirit and the Testimonies of White in 1888 and its aftermath, when the church chose to emphasize law-keeping at the expense of the gospel of grace through Christ. The failures of the past need not hinder the current generation of Adventists in their quest for truth--the enduring principles in Scripture, White's Testimonies, or any other source.

Johnsson continues by stating that diversity could be good "so long as we don't follow blindly any human leader" or "turn our teachers into gurus."<sup>79</sup> But he confesses that gurus already move about among us, and he lists a few of them.<sup>80</sup> Several of these scholars have significant support among the laity for their points of view. This diversity is a cause of conflict, stagnation, and name-calling as groups are labeled liberals, conservatives, or radicals. Certainly, this is not a healthy diversity for the denomination..

A. Leroy Moore gives evidence that the laity is no less divided than the scholars. He remarks that "the very urgency pervading our conflict over divine authority makes communication almost impossible. Each side so intensely defends one set of principles that it precludes any objective examination of the other."<sup>81</sup> It appears that the standard routes to resolution are impassable. Therefore, I have chosen not to address this issue from a theological angle. Instead, this dialogical hermeneutic is presented as an example of how the principles embedded in White's Testimonies can be re-discovered and appropriated by the current generation of Adventists.

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<sup>79</sup> Johnsson, 94-95.

<sup>80</sup> Johnsson, 95, 90.

<sup>81</sup> Moore, 66.

If Adventist children are to have a future in the church, religious education must begin in the home with Adventist parents. Roger Dudley says that if Project Affirmation<sup>82</sup> is to succeed in helping the Adventist Church have a bright future, schools and congregations are not the only places in need of reform. Dudley identifies the home as the most important place to begin. The future success of the church requires Christ-filled families. Getting these families “will call for a massive program of parent education,”<sup>83</sup> because parents need to be taught how to lead homes that will be a blessing to the church.<sup>84</sup>

White issued a similar appeal long ago. She was distressed that so little effort was being put forward by the church to help mothers learn how best to care for their children. White complained that mothers were ignorant of children’s physical needs; that mothers knew little about the laws of health or principles of childhood development. White declared that Adventist mothers of her day were unprepared to direct the spiritual and mental growth of their children.<sup>85</sup>

White insisted that both parents needed thorough and careful training for the duties of parenthood. She wrote:

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<sup>82</sup> “Project Affirmation was a three-year program of K-12 and Higher Education Boards of the North American Division of the Adventist church which sought to establish grassroots consensus on the vision of Adventist education and to translate the visions of leaders and members into educational change.” Dudley and Gillespie, 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 280.

<sup>84</sup> Dudley and Gillespie, 281.

<sup>85</sup> White, Education, 275.

Before taking upon themselves the possibilities of fatherhood and motherhood, men and women should become acquainted with the laws of physical development—with physiology and hygiene, with the bearing of prenatal influences, with the laws of heredity, sanitation, dress, exercise, and the treatment of disease; they should also understand the laws of mental development and moral training.<sup>86</sup>

Home religion is greatly needed, and our words in the home should be of a right character, or our testimonies in the church will amount to nothing. Unless you manifest meekness, kindness, and courtesy in your home, your religion will be vain. If there were more genuine home religion, there would be more power in the church.<sup>87</sup>

From these two quotations, supported by discussions in previous chapters, two enduring principles can be gleaned: (1) a responsibility of religious education is to prepare adults for parenthood; and (2) the genuine, godly lives of parents impacts the spiritual development of children positively.

The theories of Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Alice Miller, and John Westerhoff confirm the importance of the home. Their theories validate the saying: “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” White would agree. These theorists do not declare White right; nor do they address the question of whether White was inspired of God. Their works tend to clarify and expand White.

White calls for the youth to be educated to critically examine what they are taught and to know what they believe, so that they can become the pillars of the church, champions of truth and faith, and individuals who will not betray sacred trusts.<sup>88</sup> White

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<sup>86</sup> White, Education, 276.

<sup>87</sup> White, Adventist Home, 319.

<sup>88</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Best Education and Its Purpose,” Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 21 Nov. 1893, 725.

counsels parents not to leave the spiritual education of their children to the church alone, since “children have heard the Scriptures misinterpreted, and have thought this misinterpretation must be the truth.”<sup>89</sup> White insinuates that children are confused when their parents, using arguments that they have heard presented in sermons, prevent the children from accepting concepts that seem biblically sound.<sup>90</sup> She reminds parents that they have a responsibility to study Scripture for themselves, because apostasies occur and people are misled when they depend upon the words of others instead of studying for themselves.<sup>91</sup> White urges parents to comply with the conditions stated in the Bible, to repent of their sins, and to be converted, so that they, as fit representatives of the faith of Jesus, might be qualified to educate their children tenderly and kindly.<sup>92</sup> In the past, Adventist adults failed to carry the standard faithfully. They failed, in part, because they unwisely assumed that what they were being taught about White and her Testimonies was correct. When this teaching began to face serious challenges in the 1970s, many Adventists became confused. The denomination’s management of White’s Testimonies reveals the awesome power that assumptions wield in the affairs of humankind. John Westerhoff contends that “assumptions can limit our awareness,” increasing the difficulties associated with making adjustments which have been necessitated by

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<sup>89</sup> Ellen G. White, “How Parents Should Discipline Their Children,” Signs of the Times, 13 Aug. 1896, 7.

<sup>90</sup> White, “How Parents Should Discipline,” 7.

<sup>91</sup> White, “How Parents Should Discipline,” 7; and Selected Messages, 2:394.

<sup>92</sup> White, “How Parents Should Discipline,” 7.

changing conditions.<sup>93</sup> The denomination's long-term use of the proof-texting method with White's Testimonies failed to keep faith with her expressed counsel. This failure is critical because it has eventuated in the current disengagement by Adventist youth. White prophesied that "it is the way that the standard is carried now that will determine the future."<sup>94</sup>

Adventism will have a bleak future unless the current disengagement of Adventist youth from White's Testimonies is remedied. The youth have repudiated proof-texting. They need to be taught how to critique scripture and the Testimonies of White for themselves. Ruether's theory, as noted in chapter two, is useful here. She maintains: that human experience is both the beginning and ending point in the circle of interpretation; that laws, rituals, and symbols must speak to human experience or be thrown aside; and that traditions die if the foundational paradigm is no longer meaningful to new generations.<sup>95</sup> White's Testimonies must speak to the experience of Adventist youth in meaningful ways or risk being permanently shelved.

Because the theological routes for settling doctrinal differences are currently impassable within Adventism, this dissertation follows an academic path. The engagement of White with Rizzuto, Miller, Westerhoff, and other theorists is one example of how her Testimonies can be honestly and critically examined, using non-Adventist sources. White's management of her own Testimonies reveals that she, like all

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<sup>93</sup> Westerhoff, Will Our Children, 10.

<sup>94</sup> White, "Dangers of the Young," (Testimony 31, 1882), Testimonies, 5:128.

<sup>95</sup> Ruether, 111-12.

other prophets, was not free from the socializing influences of her time; yet the positions she took are balanced and reasonable even now. The manner in which the church related to her Testimonies was not always honest, nor reasonable. The current impasse need not be permanent if contemporary Adventist youth are taught how to critique scripture, doctrines, and the Testimonies for themselves.

Alice Miller offers further encouragement. She declares that the human soul is nearly indestructible. She assures us that even the most abused child on earth can survive and thrive if only someone will enter into a loving relationship with it.<sup>96</sup> It is not too late for Adventist youth to develop a new relationship with God, the Bible, the Church, and the Testimonies of Ellen White. Perhaps the church can still respond to Westerhoff's call for conversion and become an agent through which parents can be re-educated regarding their role as representatives of God to their children. White offered words of consolation and hope mingled with a call for conversion, to Christlikeness:

Those who have been training their children in an improper way need not despair; let them become converted to God and seek for the true spirit of obedience, and they will be enabled to make decided reforms. In conforming your own customs to the saving principles of God's holy law, you will have an influence upon your children.<sup>97</sup>

Rizzuto's insights about how children form God representations should convince us of the importance of having the best of relationships within the home.<sup>98</sup> The conscious

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<sup>96</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 276-79.

<sup>97</sup> White, Child Guidance, 173.

<sup>98</sup> White wrote that "if religion is to influence society, it must first influence the home circle" and "In the home the foundation is laid for the prosperity of the church. The

religious future of the child is significantly affected by the “second birth of God,” which is precipitated when the child’s pet God, the God formed from early personal experiences with parents, is introduced to the official God of religion. This encounter obliges the child to rethink and reshape its personal God.<sup>99</sup> This is a critical time in the spiritual development of the child and even more so if the representation of God developed through the interpretation of experiences with parents is very unlike the official God of religion. Both Rizzuto and Miller’s insights should alert us to the consequences of parental failure. If we can recapture good home religion, maybe Johnsson’s optimism will be rewarded.

Westerhoff’s theory of socialization/enculturation was introduced so that we could better visualize how the Adventist educational system has been used to create the current disengagement from White. Rizzuto and Miller’s theories were introduced so that we might understand why it is so important that we adults soon realize White’s vision of true education, conversion. Then, we can begin in earnest to lead our children to faith. All of this was undertaken for one simple reason: for the sake of our children.

When Adventist youth are educated to critically examine the Testimonies of White, then the impact of her writings will be restored, and respect for the inspiration of the writer renewed. When she is presented honestly regarding important issues like righteousness by faith, and when she is allowed to speak for herself regarding how her Testimonies should be used, our youth will re-engage her writings. When they personally

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influences that rule the home life are carried into the church life; therefore church duties should first begin in the home.” White, Adventist Home, 318.

<sup>99</sup> Rizzuto, Birth, 8.



discover enduring principles in her Testimonies, not only in the area of parenting, but in other areas as well, they will be intellectually challenged and stimulated.

**Adventist youth must choose to re-engage Ellen White's Testimonies.**

Meaningful re-engagement will occur when they come to view her Testimonies, not as clarification of the legal requirements for salvation, but as beneficial in their quest to know and understand God. However, this will only happen when they are provided with a hermeneutical approach that allows them to analyze and critique White's counsel for themselves. The dialogical hermeneutic presented in this dissertation provides one such tool.

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